



# **TALES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CACOPHONY SOCIETY**



Edited by  
Kevin Evans, Carrie Galbraith, John Law



Last Gasp Publishing, San Francisco



## Table of Contents

### Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society

Published by



Last Gasp of San Francisco  
777 Florida Street, San Francisco, California 94110  
www.lastgasp.com

Book © 2013 Last Gasp

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Printed and bound in China.

First Paperback Edition

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### Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society

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All uncredited text is written by Carrie Galbraith or John Law

ISBN-10: 0-86719-XXX-X

ISBN-13: 978-086719-XXX-X

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements .....   | vii |
| Foreword by Chuck Palahniuk .....  | ix  |
| Introduction .....   | xi  |
| The Family Tree .....  | 1   |
| <i>The history of the San Francisco Suicide Club, Gary Warne's Chaotic Principles, Tales of the Suicide Club</i>                   |     |
| Rethinking Cacophony: The Lance Factor .....   | 17  |
| <i>Ruminations on the Cacophony Society from its inception by a founding member</i>  |     |
| Big Doings .....   | 37  |
| <i>SantaCon, the Zone Trip Concept, Burning Man and other Zone Trips, and Art Cars</i>   |     |
| The Cacophony Pandemic .....   | 97  |
| <i>The Society moves out: tales of Lodges in Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, Detroit, and beyond</i>                               |     |
| Cacophony 2.0 and Fellow Travelers .....   | 133 |
| <i>Tales of Latter Day Cacophonists and the collaborative groups who joined with the Cacophony Society to create bigger events</i> |     |
| The Events .....   | 187 |
| <i>Tales from Rough Draft and a sampling of the many events conjured by Cacophonists</i>   |     |
| Ephemera .....   | 265 |
| <i>Snippets of the flotsom and jetsom left in Cacophony's wake</i>   |     |
| Afterword by Charlie Todd .....  | 283 |
| Afterword by Stuart Mangrum .....  | 285 |
| Index .....  | 288 |
| Photo Credits .....  | 292 |
| Letter of Thanks .....   | 293 |





## Dedication

To Tara Evans, Barbara Phillips-Jewett and Willa Mae Phillips.  
Thank you for your never ending support of my creative path.  
— Kevin Evans

To my sister, Holly; my lifelong protecting angel and closest friend.  
To Lucija, Susan and Amelia X; loyal friends through thick and thin.  
To my nieces, nephews, friends, and students around the world.  
May your creativity be limitless.  
— Carrie Galbraith

To my son Sebastian James Law, the brightest spirit I have known,  
and to his guardian angel, Gary Lee Warne, the man who gave Sebastian his name.  
Without Gary, nothing we have recorded in this book would exist.  
— John Law



## Acknowledgements

So many people contributed to the making of this book. The editors would like to extend a thank you to the following:

Ron and Colin Turner at Last Gasp Publishing for believing in us from the beginning.

P Segal for her many contributing talents, especially her efforts to polish our work to a brighter sheen.

To Tara Evans and Peter Field, without whom this book would not be complete.

To those who provided us with so much rich material written about the Cacophony Society when the events were taking place: Lance Alexander, Kurt Bier, D.S. Black, Louis M. Brill, Jack Broom, Adrienne Burk, Summer Burkes, Paul Critz, Bill Donahue, Ducky Doolittle, Mark Ehrman, Julian Guthrie, Wanda Hoberg, Stuart Mangrum, Tim Redmond, Rev Al Ridenour, P Segal, Silke Tudor, Gary Warne, David T. Warren, Chandler White, Brad Wieners, Claudia Willen, and Jac Zinder.

And to those contributors who came in after the fact to tell stories as they remembered them happening: William Binzen, Harrod Blank, Rusty Blazenhoff, Thomas Burchfield, Sister Kitty Catalyst, Chris DeMonterrey, Peter Field, Dean Gustafson, Chris Hackett, Sebastian Hyde, Lucija Kordic, Michael McElligott, Denzil Meyers, Steve Mobia, Chicken John Rinaldi, Gregory Pat Scandalis, Julia Solis, Danny Girl Waters, and Marc Weber.

Thanks to Lucija Kordic for our website; also Summer Burke, Simone Davalos, Kevin Mathieu, and Dawn Stott for various online assistance and Marisa Ong for

proofreading.

Thanks to John Gilmore for his ongoing support.

Thanks extended to Alex Hau of Oceanic Printing and Johanna Rudolph of DigiPrint at City College of San Francisco, for their help and support in preparing the book for print.

A big thank you to Erik Chipchase, Dean Gustafson, Sebastian Hyde, and Winston Smith for artwork added to our book.

### Special Thanks:

Calvena and Roy Evetts, George Fessenbecker, aka George Dokes of the International Brotherhood of Storytellers (I.B.S.), the Wagner family, the Randazzo family, Barron Storey, William Shields, Sue Bonnin, Queen Nevaeh of SangRoyal, Sanzaru Games, and The Melvins.

— Kevin Evans

The Werner family, Andriy Leysheshyn, and Karen Lovato, and my many friends who gave their complete support through the three-years of bringing this book to life. To my colleagues in design who generously served as sounding boards throughout the design and production process, especially Erik Chipchase and Lucija Kordic.

— Carrie Galbraith

For introducing me to the world of Chaos, Cacophony, and Dark Saturnalia, I remain forever indebted to Gary Warne, Adrienne Burk, David T. Warren, and Nancy Prussia.



## When Giblets Filled the Air: My Introduction to Cacophony

Chuck Palahniuk

My first time was at The Alibi, a Polynesian-themed bar in North Portland. A friend had found a flyer stapled to a telephone pole. “Free Voodoo Weddings,” it said. “Tiki-Con.” The flyer promoted a night of retro-jungle music, nothing racist-racist, just the brooding fantasy music you’d hear in the soundtrack of Tarzan movies from the 1940s. Luau music with chattering monkeys and screeching parrots mixed in the background. The Alibi seemed the perfect place for it, a bar built to cater to Greatest Generation service men returning from the Pacific Theater, all plaster-of-Paris volcanoes and papier-mâché hula dancers glowing, lurid, under black light. I kid you not, the salad bar is a repurposed wooden lifeboat. Picture Trader Vic’s but in the wrong neighborhood.

Whatever this Tiki-Con was, it sounded like zany fun. People in Berlin have an old saying: “Berlin runs by many clocks,” meaning they have lots of nightlife options. Maybe in Manhattan you could dress as a slutty chicken and boogie, suspended inside a go-go cage at the Limelight, but you’d be surprised how few choices people in Portland, Oregon had on a Friday night in 1993.

So we went to The Alibi, and we went early and claimed a big booth in the middle of the action and ordered drinks that arrived in life-sized ceramic skulls. Drinks that smoked with dry-ice fog, like a mad scientist had mixed them. I wore a Hawaiian shirt. I wore a puka shell necklace that I’d bought before they were ironic, back when the best way to get laid was to look as much as possible like Christopher Atkins in “The Blue Lagoon,” back when white people still dreamed of going native.

The people who’d organized Tiki-Con: the Cacophony Society, they called themselves. They looked like they didn’t care how they looked. Like they never went to the gym or counted calories. When they tried to dance, it was even worse. They flailed, and not in an angry-mosh-pit-punk-rock way. They spun their record albums of weird

Hollywood paradise music and hopped around flapping their arms or they puckered their lips and pretended to be tropical fish. They danced like Special Olympics. These Cacophony people, they were so un-cool they made even me look cool. Goodness, they were pitiful.

So my friends and I, we drank our Blue Hawaii’s, and for an hour we were the cool people at least in comparison to the people who were hosting the party. But then the actual cool people began to arrive – late, like they always do – and they wore miniskirts or Jordache jeans and sneered at everything, like they always do. They took over the dance floor. They took over everything.

All through high school I only pretended to cheer at pep rallies and football games. While the crowds roared, I merely gaped my mouth open and shut, fake-cheering, like someone choking to death on a fish bone. If that makes me a misanthrope – not being thrilled to adore and applaud the people whom the culture already adores – so be it.

So we were booth hogging at the Alibi, and the perfect people flooded in and turned a wacky Friday night into just-another-boring-beauty contest. They posed and preened. The Cacophony people got squeezed into a smaller and smaller corner, but they persevered. The jungle music kept playing, but you couldn’t really hear it. Not even the trumpeting elephants, not anymore. As advertised, someone began to officiate “voodoo weddings.” A voodoo witch doctor wearing a necklace of animal teeth stood above the crowd and chanted mumbo-jumbo. Men married women. Women married women. People married themselves.

Not that the milling hordes of beautiful people even noticed. No, they’d arrived and kept on arriving, turning Tiki-Con into just another banal mating ritual. Really, isn’t that what everything devolves to for those people? Just

another showcase for hook-ups? A hipster shop window for flaunting clear skin and thick, glossy hair. Biceps and boobs. Boobs and biceps. Pose, pose, posing.

That's when the impossible happened. The room was packed beyond fire codes, every molecule of breathable air displaced by a fog of Giorgio and Polo, and not even the servers could squeeze through to replenish our Singapore slings and zombies. Just when it seemed as if we'd be hemmed in forever by these tedious breeding rites... the witch doctor stopped his gibberish sermonizing and threw a handful of something over the heads of the crowd. This clump of something scattered into a cloud of wet mini-things that rained down on the perfect rockabilly haircuts. The witch doctor threw another handful, and more mysterious somethings splattered the scenester crowd. A profane anointing.

One of the soft fragments went splat on our table. And there it was: A wilted, blue bowel. A loopy length of wet intestine. Next to that landed a tiny lung. A gizzard splashed into a friend's Rum Collins. A bloody heart plopped into a Long Island Iced Tea. Real blood in our fake skulls.

It was chicken guts. Giblets filled the air.

It was that movie, "Carrie," only in reverse. Instead of the cool kids putting the spastic on stage and pelting her with gore, this was the social reject delivering the offal. The thatched-roof, South Sea ambience was filled with screams and slaughterhouse odors. Another detail you never get from movies and the Internet is how things in real life smell. It smelled awful.

It was a hipster stampede. The formerly chill'n play-ahs, they climbed and clawed over each other in their fight for the exit.

The outsider misfits had baited and successfully sprung their voodoo trap.

There was a lesson here: Homemade entertainment versus store-bought. Actual cool versus the appearance of being cool.

Finally, the misanthropes had won. The football stars and cheerleaders were routed. It was Cacophony, and I was hooked.

Here was an escape from the treadmill of always looking good and always looking good and always looking... In the Cacophony Society you could embrace the terrible. Today, I see a little of this same genius in the zombie culture, where people lurch around with their insides on the outside, but in 1993 we didn't have zombie walkathons and zombie conventions. In 1993 we had Tiki-Con. Here, you could propose an idea, any scary, ridiculous stunt – What if we dressed as Mad Hatter characters and played croquet with bowling balls and sledge hammers? What if we rode kayaks through the sewers? – and days later, people would create that scenario as a new, short-lived reality.

It was a laboratory for experimenting with the culture. And for experimenting with ourselves. In so many ways, it was my inspiration.

You don't say anything because fight club exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends.

Still, as my mother used to warn me, "It's always fun and games until someone loses an eye."

The trouble was my friends didn't laugh. They couldn't see anything beyond their ruined drinks and the stains on their clothes. They saw no benefit in having their innards on the outside, even if it was just for a couple hours.

The good news is that I made new friends.



## Introduction

The Cacophony Society was a collective comprised of rabid individualists who would never join a collective, a Chautauqua of kooky non-conformists, a potlatch for outsiders; it was a movement that moved in any or all directions, though rarely in the same one—in pursuit of a common goal, as stated in the monthly newsletter: a pursuit of shared experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society.

Cacophony was not conceived as an art movement. Many members would not self-identify as artists, although there were some noted artists among the members, and many Cacophonists and their fellow travelers would go on to successful careers in the arts. Others would find that their identification with the unselfconscious creative nature of the group and its actions would lead them inevitably to a life in some form of the arts.

Neither was Cacophony political or spiritual, although some of the better-known events hinted at a political agenda, and the experiences of the group had consequences that surely lifted the human spirit. Certainly, it could never be classified as a business; it was far too mystifying a concept for any single ego to claim and too slippery a legacy for anyone to actually own; it never offered the slightest tangible profit, although its intangible profit was vast.

This loose aggregate of personalities definitely came together to play, in ways as ingenious and unprecedented as possible; Cacophony brought the concept of playing in the world as adults into mainstream consciousness, through hundreds of events organized by members over twenty years. Cacophony also partnered with other groups of pranksters, performers, and artists, sometimes for one event, or sometimes to produce an annual event over time.

Cacophony championed a creative philosophy of fun, stretching the parameters of what could be seen as entertainment, with a basis in unorthodox ideas and

direct engagement with the world and people in it. What constituted fun was left entirely to each member's generally vivid imagination. Event ideas were posted in the newsletter, *Rough Draft*, and others played or not, depending on their own predilections. Some invitations to play captured the group's fancy to such an extreme that the huge turnout at an event was almost its undoing; sometimes a lone participant, or none at all, would show up at the appointed time and place.

There were many kinds of events, some so bizarre as to defy a category. Others fell into discernible types or combined different kinds of activities in the creation of a single event. Pranks, urban exploration, literary events, theatrical or musical endeavors, costumed parties, urban games, and the mysterious Zone Trips were just some of the categories to inspire collaborative play. Some event agendas included preliminary meetings to make props or prepare a chosen location for the group activity to come; other activities were not premeditated, but happened spontaneously when friends gathered and had nothing to do that night.. Some sub-groups of Cacophony concentrated on specific goals, like The Billboard Liberation Front's clever improvement of advertising messages in the urban landscape.

Pranksters executed ideas with such finesse that they could fool mainstream media; one notorious prank was the *Fantasia* Protest, which gathered faux protesters to object to aspects of the famous Disney film. *Time Magazine* featured the prank in an article about the growth of whining as a national obsession. Groups were invented to march in the annual parade in Berkeley, like a pro-carnivore posse called People Eatin' Them Animals, or the Undead Homeowners' Association. The Salmon Run pranked the city's annual Bay-to-Breakers marathon with people in salmon costumes running upstream against the other runners. Let Them Eat Cake gathered fantastically costumed 18th century French aristocrats to give away cake—to the homeless and other willing recipients—in front of City Hall on Bastille Day.

The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society. We are the punctuation at the end of hypothetical sentences, words in the prose of technological satire, grammarians of absurdist syntax and our numbers are prominent in the flat edge of a curve. You may already be a member!

# Rough Draft

Issue #75, December 1992  
The Official Organ of the San Francisco Cacophony Society.

**No Christmas in July**  
Saturday Dec. 5th, 2:00 P.M.

A group of concerned citizens, elves and Santas will gather downtown to circulate what will appear to be a genuine petition to get Christmas decorations, music and TV and radio commercials banned except in December of each year. The idea is to enrage the merchants of the city and to sympathize with the visually and aurally assaulted shoppers in what seems to be becoming a year long shopping season.

**Wear:** Santa suits, Elf attire and tasteless Christmas scarves, hats, sweaters, bells or whatever you have and a clip board if you have one.

**Meet:** Union Square, at the base of the statue.  
**Sponsored by:** Kimric & Heidi

**A Call to B.A.R.C. / A Farewell to Armaments**  
Sunday Dec. 6th, 9:30 A.M.

Come join our Thompsonesque gathering in the mist of an East Bay morning to discharge firearms and tell heinous lies of long forgotten battles. Bring pictures or photocopies of your most detested peevs and turn the morning into



a psychotherapy session. Unfortunately there will be no bears at this event as they are not indigenous to the region anymore. Please NO alcohol, drugs, automatic weapons or explosives (the authorities that be have but a small sense of humor.)

**Where:** Richmond Gun Club, 3155 Goodrick Ave. (off Parr in the city of Richmond.)  
**Bring:** Firearms, ammo \$5 per person range fee and lies or favorite firearms/war related readings.  
The un/poorly armed are welcome, but please RSVP so we can anticipate needs.  
**Your hosts:** J.D. Boggmann and associates -- RSVP  
( )  
**Directions to the range ( )**

**Non Event**  
Wednesday Dec. 9th, all day.

**Dress like you always do. Do what you normally do.**  
Object of the event: See if you can pick out the other participants. This was a really big event last year. Let's see if we can do it again!

**Sponsored by:** The Bureau of Objective Reality.

**Seattle Pilgrimage**  
December 10th thru 13th.

The first union of San Francisco and Seattle Cacophony will take place when we accompany baby Jesus on a journey northward to the sunless city of expresso, garage bands and spawning ground for the new rock of ages. A full agenda of events is planned. We'll be leaving Wednesday morning in rented vans and return Sunday night. Share transportation and lodging costs, aprox \$60 person. Food extra. Call if you are interested in spending 16 hours or more traveling in a small metal room getting to know your fellow Cacophonists.

**White Christmas**  
Saturday Dec. 19th, 7:00 P.M.

Advance reservations are mandatory; space is limited. We're dreaming of a white Christmas in the extreme. We're hosting a grand, formal solstice celebration at which every thing -- the decor, the food and the guest's clothing will be white. As a symbol of the triumph of light over darkness, a bleak, gray urban environment will be transformed into a magical white room of light and festivity. We'll feast on all-white food, drink white wine and listen to musical selections from "White Christmas" to "White Room."

To attend you must: 1) Send \$5 materials fee (in cash or a check made out to "cash") to White Christmas, P.O. Box , S.F. 94142 before December 15. You'll receive written instructions about when and where to meet; 2) Bring a grand podluck meal which is white; 3) wear all white clothes (this is man-

The city was Cacophony's playground, and urban exploration plumbed its options. Some events, like the late-night walking tours of the area's sewers and storm drains, plumbed quite literally. "Enter the Unknown" newsletter entries and calls for Midnight Walks summoned interested parties to meet at a designated place for a guided ramble through undisclosed terrain. A huge empty warehouse on the bay at the end of 20th street was the central location of the Seceadarean Odyssey, which offered canoe rides through hidden underground canals leading to the bay and other adventures spread through this colossal space.

Literary events were highly popular and took many forms. Poetry Breakfasts appealed to early risers who liked to greet the sun, in incongruous locales, reading from seminal verse. Tippling With Kipling combined two greatly favored activities, reading and drinking. Dark humor pervaded some events, like the Suicide Note Writing Workshop. The Marcel Proust Support Group gathered frustrated fans of serious literature to plow together through one of their most daunting challenges, at the sensible rate of 10 pages a day, meeting regularly in fin-de-siècle venues for moral support. In a gesture of affectionate nose thumbing at the circle of Proustitutes, the Charles Bukowski Support Group met at the race track or seedy Tenderloin bars and read from the works of their particular master. Sometimes Midnight Walks

had a literary theme, featuring readings from poetry or novels at various stops along the way. For those who just liked to read and discuss, there was a marginally conventional book club that met and read a different book each month.

Some events had a distinctly theatrical flair, and at some of these, the only witnesses to the production were the players themselves. The annual Exquisite Corpse revived the Dadaist concept of the audience writing the play, each writer seeing only the line written before, and utilizing a set batch of props assembled for inspiration; a finished page of text was rushed to the stage, where others acted it out. The Atomic Café brought people to an elaborately decorated bunker for a post-apocalyptic swap meet and storytelling of the end of the world as they had known it. Other events, like the Operatic Banquet, offered musical jest.

Urban Games used the city streets, hotels, and other locations to stage games usually reserved for more logical turf. The Urban Iditarod and Urban Golf gave new meaning to old sport. Variations on Capture the Flag such as Capture the Dummy played out in a wide variety of locations, and games with dubious names, like Assassin and X-Files Investigator, were held in a variety of venues to the absolute confusion of the general public that happened to be in the way.

## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**EMPEROR NORTON'S BIRTHDAY**

**CACOPHONY CELEBRATED ITS DECEASED PATRON SAINT'S BIRTHDAY BY CONVERGING AT THIS INFAMOUS ECCENTRIC'S GRAVE IN COLMA, CALIFORNIA. JOSHUA NORTON PROCLAIMED HIMSELF EMPEROR OF THE UNITED STATES AND PROTECTOR OF MEXICO IN 1859. THOUGH DESTITUTE, NORTON BANQUETED FREE OF CHARGE IN MANY OF SAN FRANCISCO'S SUPERLATIVE GASTRONOMIC VENUES. THE CITY'S GAZETTES WERE KNOWN TO PUBLISH THIS NONCONFORMIST'S OUTLANDISH PROCLAMATIONS. THE EMPEROR'S HAND-FASHIONED CURRENCY WAS ACCEPTED AS LEGAL TENDER BY MANY WITHIN THE CITY'S BORDERS. SO ADORED, THIRTY THOUSAND MOURNERS ATTENDED NORTON'S MEMORIAL SERVICE IN 1880.**

Facing page: The Cacophony Society's newsletter, *Rough Draft*, had a rotating editorship and a bevy of artists creating work to adorn its pages. This sample, from 1992, shows the variety of events possible in any given month.





Almost all Cacophonists loved costume parties and wouldn't settle for limiting them to Halloween. The Gothic Nouveau Winter's Ball invaded the rotunda of the Palace of Fine Arts in the wee hours of a typically very cold night. Victorian Croquet, the Black and White Bowl, clown events, and the White Trash Family Picnics demanded a considerable variety of looks and props. The Betsy Ross Sewing Circle and Terrorist Society, which met on Flag Day, combined a costume event with the purpose of creating an entirely new national flag. White Christmas, a holiday banquet in a bunker painted white, called for costuming, food, plates, tablecloths, and other props entirely in snowy monochrome.

No category could possibly cover some offerings, like The Cave Shaman Meets the Marshmallow Roast, at which people came in the shamanistic garb of invented cultures and spoke in tongues, the Guerilla Sweat Lodge, or The Journey Across the Waters of Oblivion to the Temple of the Living Dead, a vampire event. A workshop that dismantled toys and reassembled the parts in unlikely combinations also defies categorization, as did Fair Play For Rabbits or Cyberpunk in Sector Four.

xiv

During slow months, when the newsletter had little to offer, the editor for that issue might insert intriguing fake events. Dave's Snake Hunt, Eat the Dead, Vigilante Justice, and Swim the Farallones were unlikely to draw much response. Duct those Suckers proposed slapping duct tape over the mouths of hipsters on Haight Street. Sometimes these fake events parodied traditional ones of

well-established organizations, like the Initiation Into The Knights of Columbus, or the Cremation of Care, the somber ceremony at The Bohemian Grove.

Perhaps the most mysterious of the events were the Zone Trips, calls to venture to a distant and unknown location for an undisclosed purpose. Adventurers willing to show up might find themselves on a tour of California missions, invading a convention of people who believe they're in contact with aliens, or in a place like Los Angeles or Covina. Perhaps the most famous of Cacophony's Zone trips was The Adventure of the Burning Man, which took Cacophonists to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada, where, over time, it would grow into

an international event attended by thousands of people each year.

While Cacophony played for its own amusement and with little self-consciousness, its ideas live on in its progeny. Burning Man is the most visible and successful pop culture phenomenon that was developed with Cacophony know-how. This massive event still claims a philosophy that has its roots in Cacophony's mores, such as "Leave No Trace" and "No Spectators."

The antics of the Billboard Liberation Front (BLF), beginning in 1977, set the standard for billboard art and advertising pranking for years to come. The BLF encouraged the improvement of billboards with a how-to-manual and manifesto, and inspired the evolution of the phenomenon of "culture jamming," a concept further polished by *Adbusters* magazine, which in turn would inspire the Occupy movement.

Cacophony's urban exploration events would also encourage adventurers in other places to examine the little-known corners of their own cities. Urban Exploration (UE) has also grown into a global phenomenon, with the development of groups like New York's Dark Passage, which was founded by East Coast Cacophony transplants. The Cacophony Society's promotion of other groups, which offered early examples of proto-machine art, helped foment an already growing international fascination with the art of the machine and robotics. Some of these groups included Survival Research Labs, SEEMEN, and PeopleHater.

Above: Cacophony Society group photo taken at Beaver Street park in the Castro District, 1994.

Cacophony "lodges" developed in other cities, each with a particular local flavor. In San Francisco, a fresh generation of pranksters and other event organizers sprang up, following the lead of their predecessors. This iteration of Cacophony ideas is known affectionately as Cacophony 2.0.

While Cacophony encouraged others to expand their horizons of creative play, it too had influences that made it what it was. Principal among these was the legendary Suicide Club, which developed in San Francisco in the 1970s. A secret society, The Suicide Club eventually suffered from insularity and an inability to draw in new members. When it disbanded, former Suicide Club members missed the innovative source of play and reorganized under the new and inclusive umbrella of Cacophony.

The society also found influences and ideas in countless other sources. Novels, movies, history, myth, family stories, urban legend, and folk tales all influenced the group and provided ideas that became events, when filtered through the imaginations of the members. They also found inspiration in historical figures, people who would become beatified in the eyes of many Cacophonists. Two of the "saints" in Cacophony's cosmology were Emperor Norton and Alfred Jarry.

Emperor Norton, San Francisco's best-known eccentric, lived a rich, tumultuous, and mythic life. Joshua Norton was a successful businessman in the years following the San Francisco gold rush of 1849. He lost his fortune when he attempted to corner the rice market and failed. Mentally unhinged from his fall from the heights of society, Norton declared himself Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico on September 17, 1859. Clad in a grand and colorful uniform, Norton ate and drank for free in numerous city establishments and was celebrated by the press and his fellow citizens.

Although he may have been crazy, he was also prescient. Among his imperial decrees was the demand to build a bridge across the bay, which would be realized 63 years later. He also produced spontaneous bits of street theater; in one famous incident, he stopped a hostile group from attacking poor Chinese immigrants by standing between the mob's pitchforks and torches and their ostensible victims, reading poetry aloud and praying. Emperor Norton would have been welcome at any Cacophony event.

Alfred Jarry was the visionary fool who invented the philosophy of Pataphysics, which elevated the mind above the mere concept of metaphysics, and would inform the Dada and Surrealist movements; much later, it would inspire The Church of the Sub-Genius, Discordianism, Cacophony, and countless other fringe and underground groups.

Jarry launched a frontal assault on the bourgeois sensibilities of Parisian society in the 1890s. He produced only one play in his lifetime, and the first production ended in a riot. The first actor on stage uttered the first word of dialogue, "merde," French for "shit," and the audience went mad and tore the theater apart. He was seen all over Paris on a bicycle, flaunting a dueling pistol on each hip. When annoyed by a neighbor's unruly children, Jarry offered to shoot them, claiming the ability to reconstitute the urchins through pataphysical methods. Not surprisingly, he developed a mesmerizing sway over the Parisian avant garde. He continued to have a similar effect on Cacophony, nearly a century later.

Like its heroes, the Cacophony Society espoused behaviors thought slightly mad and questioned the values of the bourgeoisie, the ever-burgeoning power of industrial and manufacturing giants, the power of advertising to employ classic conditioning in the shaping of human choice, and the increasingly mediated society that wallows in passive entertainment, lulled into complacency before a screen. And, as with real life as opposed to that depicted on the flickering screen, Cacophony was not merely fun and entertaining. It could be scary, dirty, dangerous, and even exceptionally stupid at times.

Cacophony rose to the challenge of the mediated life and encouraged others not to ignore the potent power of play. Unconsciously, it reflected the wisdom of philosophers from ancient Greece to contemporary America. Plato wrote, "Life must be lived as play." The 20th century American philosopher George Santayana said, "To the art of working well, a civilized race would add the art of playing well." And Carl Jung wrote that "The creation of something new is not accomplished through the intellect, but by the play instinct." Through its championing of play for adults, Cacophony played a vital role in turning the consciousness of contemporary culture away from passive entertainment, and toward a more vital, creative, and innovative concept of what it means to be entertained.

This book, like all the other joint adventures of the Cacophony Society, is a work written, illustrated, designed, and assembled by its members.

Cacophony, never the most competent of "organizations," remains, to this day, primarily a philosophy, steeped in the tradition of Dada, and geared to living and playing in a world created, in part through the collective fantasies of its members. There is nothing stopping you. You hold in your hands a how-to-manual of sorts. Atop each Cacophony *Rough Draft* newsletter was a reminder to readers: "You may already be a member."



xv



## The Family Tree

cacophony

1650s, from Gk. *kakophonia*, from *kakophonos* "harsh sounding," from *kakos* "bad, evil" (see *caco-*) + *phone* "voice" (see *fame*). Related: *Cacophonous*.

cacophony — n

harsh discordant sound; dissonance

the use of unharmonious or dissonant speech sounds in language

cacophony

1. harsh discordance of sound; dissonance: a cacophony of hoots, cackles, and wails.
2. a discordant and meaningless mixture of sounds: the cacophony produced by city traffic at midday.
3. music: frequent use of discords of a harshness and relationship difficult to understand.

*Five year old Bret Falconer stared straight up into the sky. One hundred and eighty degrees of his scope of vision were filled with the massive International Orange painted Marin Tower of the Golden Gate Bridge. His father Paul's hand was on his shoulder to keep him from falling over backwards, off balance as he was. He strained to see the drama unfolding five hundred feet directly above. A group of friends had gathered on the pedestrian walkway on a rare sunny winter dawn to say good bye to a man who changed their lives and, over the years, would influence countless others, most of whom never heard his name. The man who had imagined the Suicide Club died on Thanksgiving Day, 1983, felled by a phlebitis induced heart attack, the blood disease that for forty years did not kill Richard Nixon.*

*Gary Warne's will was written four years earlier in anticipation of what might happen during a Suicide Club "infiltration" of the Moonies, a militant Christian cult. In this will, he stated clearly that he wished to be cremated and for his ashes to be tossed from the top of the tower of the Golden Gate Bridge... on a sunny day. Gary and his fellows had climbed the bridge many times during their Suicide Club years... at night... when no one, like the cops, could see you.*

*This challenge from beyond the grave was typical of Gary. It was a risky, if not impossible, task, requiring whimsical audacity and brazen action.*

*After seeing the tiny burst of ash, as the unseen hand far above cast the final remains to the winds from the dead man's favorite perch, Brett turned to his Dad and exclaimed: "Pa, I got some of the glitter in my eye!"*

The loud discordant sounds of Cacophony did not emanate from the void. To some degree, they did however come from the dead. West Virginia via Southern Florida transplant Gary Warne was one of the tens of thousands of people that came to San Francisco intending to recreate themselves. For anyone who knew Gary during his time here in the '70s and early '80s, it's no huge stretch to believe that he would set in motion events that would define underground culture for decades to come.

Communiversity, The Suicide Club, and the later Gorilla Grotto and *Answer Man* Newsletter were experiments of Warne's that predated and in some ways foretold the genesis of the Internet. The immediacy of communications and the organizing potential and omnipresence of information offered by the World-Wide Web were goals that Gary pursued sans computer, many years before the most casual of networkers discovered the immense power of personal computing.

The *Answer Man* Newsletter provided a service to anyone with access to the U.S. mail service. If you had a

1

Gary Warne in front of his Circus of the Soul bookstore on Judah and 10th Avenue, San Francisco.

This storefront was the home of the non-profit school, Communiversity. On Sunday nights, in a tiny room stuffed full of books, dozens of pillows and futons were pulled from their stash spaces above the bookshelves and spread about, turning the space into a theater for Warne's and Ron Sol's Fantasy Film Festival. Many Communiversity classes took place in this neighborhood haunt and The Suicide Club was birthed here. Warne, Adrienne Burk, David Warren, and Nancy Prussia left the warm comfort of the store to brave a terrible storm at Fort Point one night, waves crashing over their heads, while they held on to a massive waist-high chain mounted along the seawall.

The name for the new secret society was Gary's tip of the hat to Victorian adventure writer Robert Louis Stevenson and his marvelous tale, *The Suicide Club*. This tale recounted the lives and deaths of jaded urbanites "living each day as though it were their last, for, indeed it may be!"

The Suicide Club and Communiversity mottos included: "Chaos, Cacophony, and Dark Saturnalia," "Death, Where Is Thy Sting," and (borrowed from H.L. Mencken) "Guilt is a terrible thing."

question, any question, you could query The Answer Man. Rather than give the answer which, of course, is a matter of opinion and interpretation, Gary would send contact information, addresses, phone numbers, official listings for all of the organizations or individuals that were advertised as experts on the specific question. Some or all of these specialists could then be contacted for as in-depth an answer as required. Gary was a *de facto* analog search engine.

The Gorilla Grotto, Gary's experimental store-front café and "adult play environment," was an ambitious attempt to engage thinking adults with their world and their fellow humans in playful and sometime shocking ways. Each night of the week, a different theme was presented. In-depth interviews of "experts" on a wide variety of hot-button topics were the fare on Tuesdays, action/adventure play, sometimes with the group leaving the Grotto for site-specific adventures, was offered on Saturdays; on Wednesdays Gary hosted his peculiar interpretation of "group therapy" sessions that were popular in the '70s featuring the occasional parlor sex play game, and on Sundays, singular acoustic musical acts performed.

The most inventive and myth provoking creation of Gary's short life was, without a doubt, the Suicide Club. Joining with retired carnival barker/fire-eater/salesman and Club spirit of chaos, David T. Warren, and future feminist academic Adrienne Burk, Gary forged a collaborative template for a group that, despite its short life and relative obscurity at the time, would inspire and foreshadow much of what was to come in the next twenty years in the now seemingly quaint world of "underground" culture.

The Suicide Club began as a "class" at Communiversity, a San Francisco-based non-profit that had evolved out of the free-school movement of the 1960s. Gary served as student administrator for the San Francisco State based Communiversity. "Free Schools" were part of academia's response to the student upheaval of the period, with many large universities hosting free schools with small budgets, student organizing staffs, and volunteer "instructors" presenting "classes" for no charge to whomever wished to take them. In 1975, Gary and other student organizers, after disputes with the SF State hierarchy over the content



of some of the "classes" and controversy generated by State alumni over what was perceived as the frivolous state of this University funded appendage, decided to make the "free school" free by leaving the fold of higher education and turning it into a non-profit. Most of the classes offered by the newly independent organization were practical (VW repair, conversational French) or more studious (theoretical physics, Victorian literature), even as Gary and cohorts continued to host and champion stranger and stranger fare. The most popular "class" offered by Communiversity in 1975-6 was the "Pie-Of-The-Month Club," which involved participants being bushwhacked randomly during their daily lives by pie-wielding assassins.

The Suicide Club was the first formalized "urban exploration" club in the country for adults. Though college kids had been poking around the steam tunnels of their respective campuses forever, the Suicide Club set out on a campaign of active urban mapping and delving, which included large scale climbs of major suspension spans, live action costumed games in huge abandoned industrial edifices, and infiltration of weird and potentially ominous organizations such as the Unification Church (Moonies), the American Nazi Party, and the like.

Above: Ex-carmy, ex-salesman, former suburbanite family man, and itinerant fire eater David Warren staged an early Suicide Club event in Union Square on Friday the 13th in May of 1977, which involved, among other things, talking passersby into walking under David's ladder on this luckiest of days. One of the people he talked into doing this was legendary San Francisco street mime Robert Shields, shown here gnawing his teeth in trepidation. Warren, in his persona as Flammo Le Grande, initiated new Suicide Club members by blessing them with one of his torches, usually dipped into flaming alcohol held in an old Campbell's Soup can.

In addition to underground exploration (UE), the Suicide Club, through its elaborate street pranks, predated and directly or indirectly inspired what has been termed "Reality Hacking" or "Culture Jamming." The world's premiere billboard hacking group, The Billboard Liberation Front, began as a Suicide Club event hosted by Gary Warne and Adrienne Burk. Flash mobs owe a debt to The Suicide Club for the elaborate and seemingly spontaneous street events hosted by Gary and his cohorts in the 70s. "Leave no trace" was the mantra for the Club in the alien environments members found themselves in, during the elaborate and sometimes dangerous events hosted by the Suicide Club.

It was The Cacophony Society, however that picked up where the Suicide Club, Gary, David, Adrienne, and the rest left off. Cacophony was founded exclusively by ex-Suicide Club members. The range of events undertaken, experiences lived, and relationships forged in Cacophony were, in many ways, an extension of what was created a decade earlier in the Suicide Club. The main difference between the two organizations was the openness of the newly formed Cacophony Society. The ideas first championed in the evanescent experimentation of the secretive Suicide Club, were to be exposed to the world through the larger and eventually Internet enabled portal of Cacophony.



The Carnival Cosmology manifesto was mailed out with the April 1977 Suicide Club mailer/proto-newsletter to the eighty or so new club members. Gary was inspired to write it after reading about Lon Chaney's biggest fear: to hear a knock on the door on a moonlight night, to open it, and see the unsmiling face of a clown staring in.

### CARNIVAL COSMOLOGY

Gary Warne

The world is a midway; cities are its sideshows. The only difference between children and adults is that there is no one to take care of us. When we left home, it meant we were lost on the midway and, unlike God, the carry boss will only let us ride as long as we pay.

No one will come to find us. Some children will hurt us, others will stop to play... Some are still deciding. But you can sneak in, too.

I have been exploring a world of adventures, exotic locales, mystic essences; confronting my fears was the immediate goal, the predominant focus of the explorations and challenges. Now, nine months later, my fears have become wafer-like and crumbling, shadows of their former selves. Now I find fear only a final, non-evolving image that stills other possibilities, the creation of more intoxicating future images, that prevents me from entering into a visionary dialogue with whom I could become.

**CACOPHONY FACTOID**

**GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE DINNER**

ALWAYS GAME FOR FORMAL REVELRY, CACOPHONISTS WOULD CONGREGATE ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF FEBRUARY AT THE ICONIC BRIDGE'S NORTH TOWER BALCONY WALKWAY FOR FINE FOOD, DRINK, DANCE, AND THE OCCASIONAL SABER FIGHT. THIS ANNUAL HOLIDAY OF THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY WAS ORIGINALLY BIRTHED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO SUICIDE CLUB TO COMMEMORATE A BELOVED MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY. THE JOVIAL SHENANIGANS HAD AN IMPRESSIVE 20-YEAR RUN BEFORE ITS DEMISE WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY EVER VIGILANT SECURITY CAMERAS AND DIMINISHING FREEDOMS OF CONGREGATION.

Recently I have walked past the place where my fear images blotted out what would have come next if I had not been afraid. I climbed the Golden Gate Bridge three weeks ago, immersed in images of falling through space into the ocean. There was nothing to fantasize beyond this one, final, deadly image. Fantasies of my friends' deaths were perhaps even more vivid and recurring. People who didn't go asked their companions to call them when they returned, no matter what the hour. Those unable to express their love in this way simply asked for the rent before their roommates left for the climb. The image of death, for many THE culminating fear image, blots out all other possibilities.

The subject of fear has fascinated me for many years. That night I felt I understood it much better. Fear is a freeze on the future, the filter or floodgate that stops our imaginings; something within us that stops us from becoming more powerful and loving, rather than fearing those things that are more vivid than our fantasies, more powerful than our magic, more mysterious than our own mysteries.

I buried the predominance of fear in my own cosmology that night. After many months of incredible experience and a rich new flood of images and emotions, I began to see the colours and textures beyond the death images, beyond the fantasies of authority and arrest, beyond inner visions of my own failure of stamina or confidence. And something more began to emerge.

I am not speaking at all metaphorically when I say that it was the bright lights and moving colours of the big top, carnival, amusement park-midway. Once I was on the bridge, I was greeted instead by moonlight on still waters and the skyline of the city diminutively reduced to scale on a plywood board, ready for display. The outline of the city floated across in, of all shades, autumnal colours of yellow and orange. Our height did not make them that way; it allowed me to see them that way, as the houses, ships, and lights below took on a bathtub toy-like countenance. The height silhouetted by sky and underscored by the sea allowed me to place it within a gigantic midway, rather than see myself as a stick figure man within the reality of the city's overwhelming back buildings.

Two months before, I had climbed the Oakland Bay Bridge and for the first time the metaphor had become real. The bridge was obviously a jungle gym made to climb rather than drive over, the cars just using it for the in-between times. The girders were so huge that you could climb inside them like chimps, risking nothing but a strained heart from the excitement. It was then that I was first struck with the feeling that we were here to play, if nothing else, here to play with the world and other people.

Before that, I visited a ghost town in central California and it became the spook house of a long bankrupt carnival, disappearing into a marshy bog at the same pace it was

swallowed up by the past. As I walked along the tracks at night that led to the town, unsure if I was going the right way, a bouncing yellow light appeared behind and we waited for the predictable "Hey you kids, get out of here!" only to have it explode instead in to a supernaturally silent coal black train screaming into the night ahead, shaking the ground in great heaps and gulps of air as it roared past.

My mind elongated with it, as it had as a small child in front of the TV, when Daffy Duck sold Elmer Fudd a new house and then, turning to leave, opened the front door and let a train rush straight at the camera, straight at Elmer, straight at me, right through his living room and mine, my child's mind simply gasping at the possibilities.

Other possibilities are becoming much more apparent. The world is becoming a total play environment and I am becoming something else entirely. The future is no longer on a circuit like the news, entertainment something an entrepreneur plans, as I expectantly read the notices in the bleached parchments on the corner stands. It is an imagination away.



*In "Evolution Into Chaos," Warne distilled his observations on the creation of events and pranks. It was included in the Suicide Club newsletter and mailed to all members. This philosophy informed all things to come in Cacophony and Burning Man, as well as having an influence on the evolving ethos of the world-wide urban adventuring community and "culture jamming."*

**EVOLUTION INTO CHAOS: A CHRONOLOGY**

Gary Warne

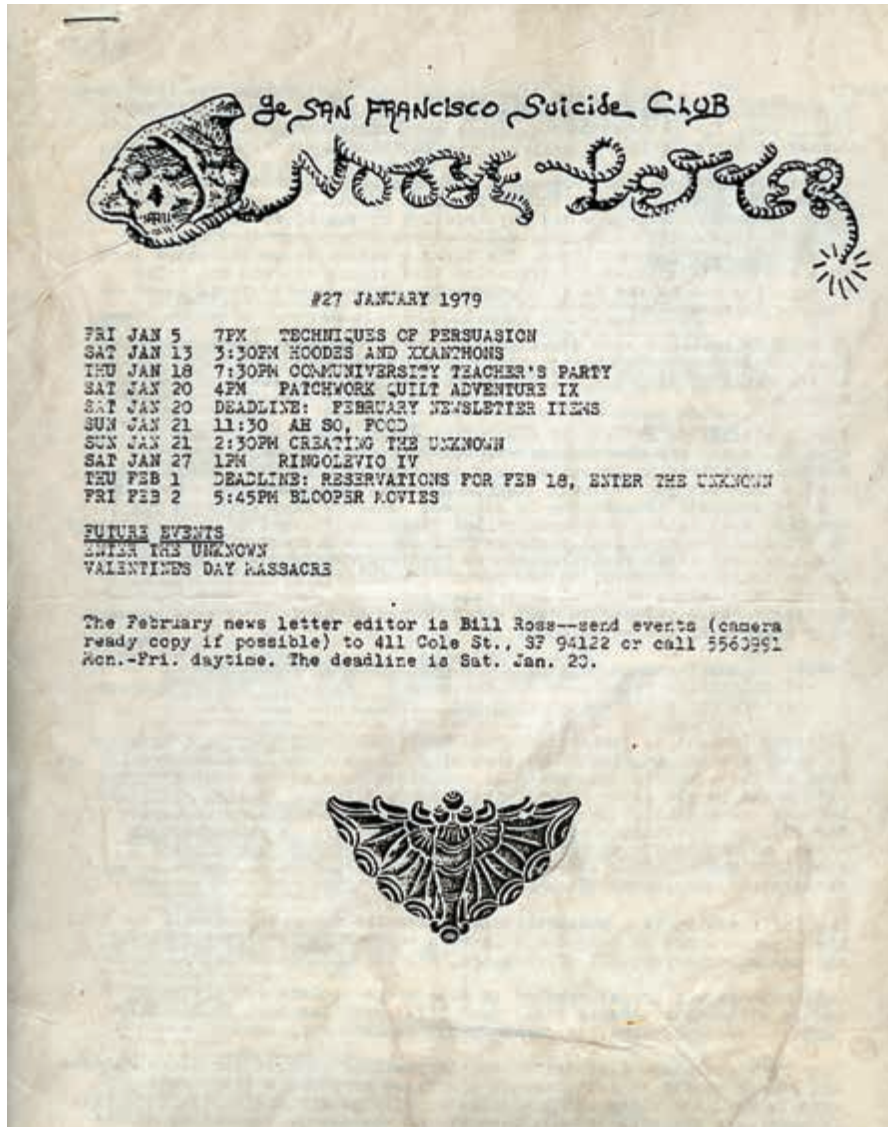
This paper is an attempt at describing the succession of stunts, parodies, and put-ons that have gathered so much attention for Communiversality and, at the same time, presenting the ridiculous concept of organizing principles for creating chaos, anarchy, and high times. Towards this end, it may also be referred to as ROBERTS RULES OF DISORDER. It is shared equally and for free to all corners in the hopes that you find the lost spirit of THE FEAST OF FOOLS and ALL HALLOWS EVE. When Communiversality was still at S.F. State in September 1974, several of us got the idea to do a practical jokes class. This event was to signal a new era for Communiversality, the Free University Movement, and many of us individually. As soon as it hit the streets, we were told it (the class) was "Not educational, in poor taste, and probably illegal from the sound of it." Preliminary discussions went on among the top brass at State about withdrawing our pay checks until threats and coercion failed. At the end of the year,



we withdrew the school from State, forming a non-profit. A hundred people signed up for the practical jokes class, making it the most popular class in the history of the school (so far). We filled a room with hundreds of large balloons, covered the floor with mattresses and pillows, covered the ceiling with a parachute, and waited.... Two doormen greeted the registrants, asked them to remove their shoes, picked them up, and threw them through the door into the room. This went on for three hours—a balloon and pillow fight, culminating in a whipped cream and feather fight, separated the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. People left hurt, pissed, creamed, feathered, and limping. The thirty people who stayed journeyed to North Beach in a Salvation Army bus and pulled five stunts. First the women put balloons in their blouses and tried to apply for jobs as topless waitresses. They wouldn't let them in. We practiced carrying imaginary plate glass windows up the street sideways: it worked, people actually walked around us! Then we tried panhandling the same people as they walked down the length of a



Above: The Naked Cable Car prank might be the Suicide Club's best known event after climbing the Golden Gate Bridge. Hosted by club founder Nancy Prussia, this event, along with a food fight and Union Square stunts, were made into postcards. Facing page: Peter Field and Louise Jarmilowicz practice ropework for future extreme urban explorations.



block—thirty people asking for spare change, all acting as if they didn't know each other. Then we tried giving money away, which didn't work either. Finally we tried to buy a banana split and couldn't come up with the money between us (30 of us, that is). This one really didn't work because we weren't very good actors; the intersection of Columbus & Broadway was so choked with people the waiter couldn't concentrate on us or even see clearly that we were together, and the idea sounded much funnier in the room than it was in action.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. I: DIVEST YOURSELF OF EXPECTATIONS.** Make sure the people you're doing something with can dish it out as well as take it. If it

6

Above: By 1978, the monthly newsletter had become the *Noose Letter*, and the format had more or less gelled. Techniques of Persuasion was a postmortem discussion of the Suicide Club's recent infiltration of a Unification Church (Reverend Moon's church in the '70s known as the "Moonies") weekend. Ringolevio was an opportunity to play the famous New York City street kids game as described by Emmett Grogan in his book, *Ringolevio*. In the events titled, *Enter the Unknowns*, you showed up committed to an unknown event. This could be anything from being part of a group that took off all their clothes and plowed into a room filled from floor to ceiling with Crisco oil coated balloons to sneaking onto a South of Market lumber yard roof to alter a billboard message (and getting arrested in the process) to being driven blindfolded to a Central Valley water slide—with the blindfold not taken off until the second you were pushed down the slide.

isn't funny when it happens to them, then you've got sadists instead of pranksters. Initiate them to be sure they have a sense of humor about themselves. Never preconceive what the reaction to an event will be like; you are sure to be disappointed. Ergo.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. II: YOU WILL NEVER BE TOTALLY IN CONTROL.**

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. III: BE A FOOL, NOT A SADIST. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE IT AS WELL AS DISH IT OUT.**

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. IV: ALLOW PEOPLE THE VALIDITY OF THEIR OWN EMOTIONS (HUMOR IS A VERY SERIOUS THING).**

When you are doing what you really want to do, maybe for the first time, allow people the reality of their own emotions and the sincerity of their own responses. Don't be shocked or bummed out if you are ignored, slugged in the mouth, or arrested. People cannot be expected to think your jokes are funny. Their reactions are no less valid than your own.

NATIONAL CLOWN WEEK Aug 9, 1974. Twelve clowns went into the B of A at Powell & Market singing "We're

in the money" and tried to deposit fish, flowers, juggling balls, and comics at the tellers' windows. The guards came and they were really MAD; they were definitely going to beat up the ring leader. I was dressed as a Keystone Cop with a giant silver badge, British bobby hat, cane, and long blue trench coat. I ran up, blew my whistle, arrested the lead clown, and dragged him away, rabid as he was, and this was a very scary moment; the other clowns had already run for the door and burst out laughing. We ran. It was scary, but it was their territory, their values, and their job: accept whatever the response is—it's real. The fact that the group broke ranks was really terrifying.

*Noose Letter* Skull logo and Dingbat by Don Herron.



Again remember Principle No. III.

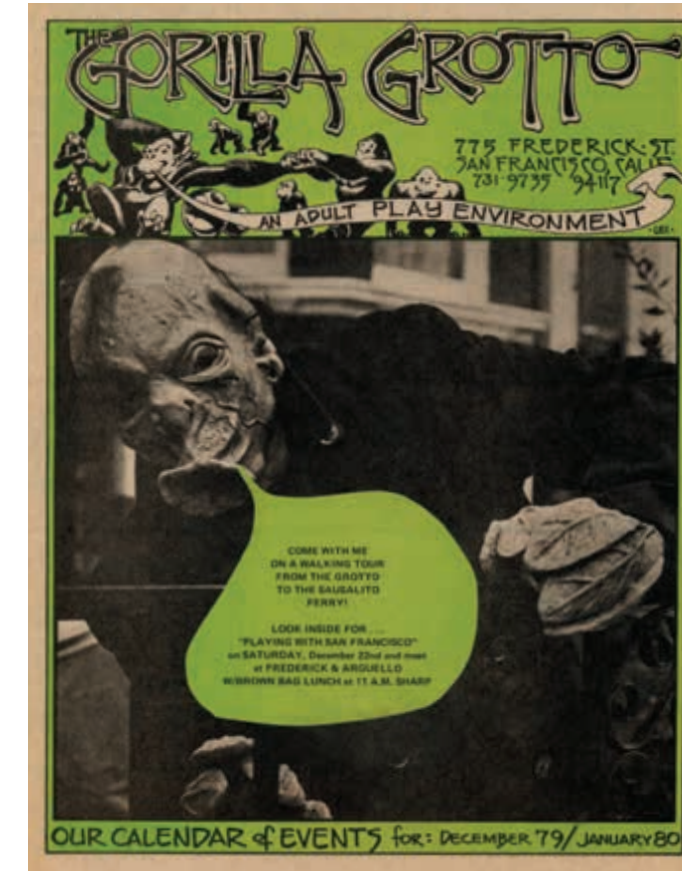
**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. V: SOLIDARITY IS A NECESSITY.** Every time we changed locations in the course of the evening's bizarrité, we lost people. This became a steadfast rule of entropy in future stunts. This is not good. The people need each other for energy and support, plus it is relatively dangerous to go out as a group to do stunts—anything can happen. If you're going to start something, finish it. Corollary: Nothing's Ever Over When You Think It Is.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. VI: PLAY IT OUT TO THE END. (ANYTHING GOES.)** A disaster: it fulfilled its title but the people couldn't trust one another because of the things each of them brought and did for and to each other with out knowing one another. A common purpose or focus decided beforehand is the best, even if people still can't go through with it; it will be an inner failing rather than paranoia. Other than initiations, and despite Principle No. II, agree beforehand on what you want to do.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. VII: THE MORE EXTREME THE ACT, THE MORE EXTREME AND VARIED THE RESPONSE WILL BE.** VOYAGE TO ANOTHER PLANET. We broke down into three groups and talked about how we imagined life on other planets. Then we blindfolded twenty-five people and took them to two unusual environments, one natural and one synthetic. We told them that when we took off their blindfolds, they could not use proper nouns, names, or earthly references for the sights they would witness. They had to decide what they were, why they were, what they did, as if they had never seen them before. Confused? For example, if we took them to a street and unblindfolded them, they couldn't use the word "concrete," "street," "pavement," "road," etc..

We took them to the Judah street tunnel under the Great Highway and took off the blindfolds in the dark. They had to walk out the seaward side, as if they were just landing on another planet, and "decide" what the ocean was. The descriptions, fantasies, and hallucinations were utterly incredible. I will never think of the ocean in the same way ever again! Then we reblindfolded them and took them into the belly of the monster, Alcoa Plaza at midnight – to Ripple's, a bar surely from the 21st century. TV sets two feet apart all the way down to the bar with curtains on either side of them like windows— all showing the ocean beating on the shoreline. Eight foot motion

7



Above: The February-May Communiversity class calendar with the first mention of the Suicide Club in print. Below: The Gorilla Grotto Newsletter. The Grotto was Gary Warne's storefront events venue, started after he left active organizing of Suicide Club events in 1979.



8 picture screens broadcasting a band playing while people danced- the band wasn't there though. Women taking off their clothes in view screens over the urinals—women could enter accompanied by men, but men couldn't see what was going on in the women's bathroom. This place was so way out on a Saturday night that no one could come up with anything farther out.

JOKE CLASSES ARE LISTED ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE FRONT PAGE. We ran joke classes every catalog for two years until our "DEATHSKOOL" catalog, when people got too confused and we stopped for a while. Someone had registered for every joke class we have ever run, no matter how outrageously it was written. When the HARI-KARI class asked them to kill themselves, they politely asked if it was real or not. For DEMONIC POSSESSION we were asked in a whisper if we "had connections." When we ran PARANOIA AS A STATE OF HEIGHTENED AWARENESS, we had to re-evaluate the whole concept of joke classes—a device, as far as we know, that no other alternative university has used. SIXTEEN people signed up for Paranoia. These were the ones either cowardly or fun loving registrars let sign up. Many more were turned away by other registrars. Some people didn't want ANY other class but that one and as you can imagine HATED filling out the skills exchange (a program we run in which participants signing up for the school offer their skills for barter). If you re-read the description a couple of times, I think you might agree that it's pretty horrible. But people

wanted it. People in on the joke wanted it to happen but the BIG QUESTION MARK was what kind of people had signed up for it? The joke became too real; everyone who wanted to see what the registrants were like were also afraid to offer their homes to find out! The joke became very real. Eight months later someone was moving out of

Above: Journalist Randy Shiits, author of *And the Band Played On*, and Barry Wolf pose in front of the Buddha Bar in San Francisco's Chinatown as characters in Don Herron's costumed street game: "The Fatty Arbuckle Caper." This event was also covered by journalist John Jacobs in a three-page feature for the *San Francisco Examiner* newspaper. Herron's live action games, utilizing fictional and historic references to hardboiled San Francisco fiction were some of the most involved role-playing games played by the Suicide Club. Herron's Dashiell Hammet walking tour, which began in late 1977, is the longest-lived literary walking tour in the US today.

their house and offered to have the class the night before they gave the keys back to the landlord. We wrote and called people, had the class, and had a very intense and fantastic evening of sharing what we were afraid of. Our first joke had become real. An incredible reversal.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. VIII: HUMOUR IS AS RELATIVE AS ANYTHING ELSE.** NIGHT OF ADVENTURES DEATHSKOOL CATALOG, SPRING 75 Description: Bring your ready to live adventures. Leave your pride at home, if we think they're either too dangerous or too boring. Must be in the borders of S.F. Twenty-five people signed up for this class and three came with adventures. After we talked for a while, people started thinking up practical jokes, but I was never sure if they were fantasizing them THEN or they had brought them. There was a practical jokes class in that catalog listed without a teacher, but no one signed up for it (everyone was afraid to sign up first, because then they had to offer THEIR house). We planned two of the three adventures for the first night and the third would be put together later. The first, mine, was to walk through the JUDAH STREET CAR TUNNEL from Duboce Park to Cole & Carl. Half of the group went home right then and never came back. Other people didn't want to go through the tunnel and didn't want to go home either, so they waited for us at the other end.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. IX: FEAR IS A STATE OF MIND: THE FEAR/RISK RATIO IS NOT PROPORTIONAL.** Since most fears are about things that have NOT happened to us or that we haven't experienced but have only witnessed through media representation or in our fantasy states, we usually don't know what an experience is like and our fears keep us from finding out.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. X: WE HAVE MANY THINGS TO RISK BESIDES OUR LIVES.** It is also possible, I won't posit a principle here, that our adventures and fantasies are a combination of excitement and fear and other people's adventures are more frightening than our own because THEY have the excitement/ motivation and we don't, so we are only left with the fear. To support this, I offer up that one of the people who waited outside of the tunnel was the one who organized the FUR SALE demonstration, which terrified me and which didn't faze him.

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. XI: WE SUBCONSCIOUSLY BELIEVE WE HAVE EXPERIENCED THINGS WHEN WE HAVE ONLY WATCHED THEM. WE HAVE NOT.**

**CHAOTIC PRINCIPLE No. XII: WHEN WE TEST OUR FANTASIES OF OURSELVES, WE FALL SHORT- SO WE DO NOT.**



## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**DAVID T WARREN**

THE MULTI TALENTED SUICIDE CLUB CO-FOUNDER, KNOWN ALSO AS FLAMMO LEGRANDE, WAS PERHAPS THE ONLY INDIGENOUS FIRE-EATER IN THE BAY AREA AT THE CLOSE OF THE 1970S. THIS COMBUSTIBLE INDIVIDUAL IGNITED A LARGE WOODEN HUMAN EFFIGY KNOWN AS BURNING MAN FOR THE LAST TIME ON BAKER BEACH IN 1989. WHEN THE EVENT WAS RELOCATED TO NEVADA'S BLACK ROCK DESERT IN 1990, FLAMMO, DEAN OF INCENDIARY ORAL EXERTIONS FOR THE ENTIRE BAY AREA, WAS AGAIN COMMISSIONED TO IGNITE THE MONOLITHIC TIMBER PERSONAGE FOR THE SENSATIONAL FINALE OF CACOPHONY'S ZONE TRIP FOUR.

EVANS

**TIME AND TINNITUS**

D.S. Black

In the years before I moved to Kuwait-on-da-Bay, I read of the existence-daring exploits of the Suicide Club in zines published by punk surrealist G. Sutton Breiding. It inspired me to pick up Robert Louis Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights* (in which the namesake story "The Suicide Club" was part of a series), a copy of which I conveniently found in the basement staff lounge of Regenstein Library, where I then worked, in Chicago.

It was intriguing for someone lately steeped in Camus and Marinetti (to say nothing of Artaud, Rimbaud, Jarry, and a galaxy of other dark stars in the grimoire of rebel metaphysics) to consider the tales of urban adventures related by Gary Warne as an invitation to live each day as though it were the last. In the final decade of the Cold War, and most especially during early Reagan, this apocalyptic fatalism was a morbidly credible conceit.

A longtime reader and science fiction fan publisher, I was accustomed to receiving word of distant exploits and then struggling to get from here to there. It was a perverse constant of speculative relativity in the years before we all got online that whatever seeming cool thing came to one's notice would have already moved on by the time one could get there. Who has seen the elephant? Or whatever iconic beast served as bait.

Arriving in San Francisco in the summer of 1983, I was thrilled to meet Gary Warne, John Law, and Don Herron at a reception for visiting *Silver Scarab* publisher Harry Morris. The sad news was the party I had been anticipating was already over: the Suicide Club had recently dissolved on the question of secrecy. Its public termination was resonant of the ritualized dissolution enacted by the Diggers when they celebrated the death of the hippie in the wake of the Summer of Love.

10 A couple months later came further grim tidings with Gary's premature demise by heart failure during a Thanksgiving visit home to West Virginia. A couple years



passed, then one of my cronies in the fantasy science fiction world reintroduced me to Herron and Law at a Third Saturday party in the Richmond.

I knew Jim Khennedy through fanzines and the amateur press since 1976. When his parties became a regular monthly event heralded by the zine *desperate in the dadabase*, they served as video-mad-scientist happenings for the motley scenes of mondoids, skiffy readers and writers, comics artists, Dick-heads, cyberpunks, space colonists, and other amiable mutants.

Gumshoe bibliographer Don Herron is an itinerant raconteur of Atlantean depth, comfortable in genres spanning mystery, horror, science fiction, and fantasy. When he brought John Law and Lance Alexander to the Third Saturday party in 1986, shortly after inception of the Cacophony Society, a few of us were eager to enter and revel in this coterie of adventurers in the unknown. Besides Jim Khennedy, mention must be made of noir fantasist Thomas Burchfield, who joined in many an early diminuendo of the Coda Cacofiles.

We signed on expectantly, laughing and loving — sometimes recklessly, creating experiences and interventions of an architextural design in chaos and spontaneity, in sync with the noise of time.



Above: Gary Warne at his desk in his bookstore, *Circus of the Soul*, in San Francisco, 1978. Facing page, above: Pierre Barral and Steve Mobia (his name is an acronym for Movie Beast) throw edibles at the Suicide Club's first food fight event in 1978, while Adrienne Burk runs away. Food fights became a staple and were staged in ever more unlikely locations, such as one at a McDonald's burger joint. Facing page, below: A Gorilla Grotto staff meeting involving many Suicide Clubbers in Golden Gate Park, 1979.

**SUGGESTIONS BASED UPON EXPERIENTIAL DATA... OR... BLOWING IT.**

Gary Warne, John Law, Adrienne Burk, David Warren from the Golden Hind, Sewers, & Kennedy Hotel Events Suicide Club *Nooseletter*, 1978

Our format has been adopted to insure the minimum of arguing, bickering, amending, censoring, and voting on other people's ideas, rules, and other volatile subjects. Each person is totally responsible for their fantasy,



the logistics of carrying it out, and the rules they want abided. It is up to the members to decide if they want to attend and when, if they do attend, they want to end their participation.

At the same time, guidelines have been offered by people in very empirical terms, e.g., what they would have done differently if they had only known... These aren't rules because we don't even meet, much less vote.

They are for whatever purposes you may use them for and as warnings or assurances for those events that bear our names.

WE DID THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT IS WRITTEN BELOW. 1) Discussions will take place at the first meeting place. People became too excited and it was so chaotic in the sewers that we couldn't get people to listen to us, stop talking or count off, or apprise them that people were following us, that we might have been in danger.

2) The leader will give a point-by-point description of the adventure as they imagine it. Diagrams would be helpful at the meeting place. When people climbed the side of the ship facing the guard-house on the Golden Hind, we realized that what was obvious to some wasn't so obvious to others.

3) The leader will give a point-by-point fantasy of what he thinks could go wrong and what he fantasizes doing about it. If they're wrong, great!

4) We will not be meeting people beyond the first meeting place, where the discussions and planning take place. We realize that this will be a hardship, but it has been more of a hardship trying to avoid hardships.

5) Verbal directions are out. Duplicate maps will be given to all drivers.

6) The organizer will provide a list of the equipment necessary and will give it to someone to check off as we leave.

7) We won't simulate danger, even for joke purposes, in situations that are possibly dangerous already.

8) We'll ask someone to be an official explainer and talk to witnesses that insist on staying and being perplexed when we're climbing buildings, etc.

9) A firm hand grasp (holding hands) will be our universal, non-verbal signal to stop talking at any volume.

10) Everybody should have all of the equipment that is specified; the organizer has advised us with a reason and we shouldn't disqualify ourselves from their requirements because we think we know better. If it says everyone must have flashlights, this means everyone (and many people still don't own one, buy one). If it says no kids, it means no kids; if it says hard soled shoes, it means hard soled shoes; if it says everyone should have a candle, EVERYONE has to have one.

We feel it's best of tell people the truth, if not the whole truth, about what we're doing. Many people are not using the planned chaos form and so are leaving information out of the write ups that others need to know, or that the leaders are not thinking about. Use them. On the small but positive side, we feel we were right about the use of costumes to offset police suspicion/repression, and food (potluck) helps!



Above: The Suicide Club somehow managed to sneak Dave Warren into a legitimate Baby Beautiful contest taking place at the War Memorial Opera House in 1977. David, middle-aged, pale, pot-bellied, scarred, with his entire body covered in Calamine Lotion, was dressed in diapers and a baby head and posed as Sweetpea Sheffield for the event.

**WHY I JOINED THE SAN FRANCISCO SUICIDE CLUB**

David T. Warren

As the years slip by and I try to align each day with the passing of my life, I find myself on tenuous ground. After forty years of living, dreaming, and working to build the kind of community that I would like to live in, I find myself faced with the reality of how little I've done to accomplish this task. I haven't tried. I am accompanied into the future with the lessons learned by my daily attendance in the school of hard sox. Though reality has popped my balloon, I arrive at this point in time with the buoyancy to find a better way to live the remainder of my life than the way I've been doing it. Apparently life offers no stable, secure, rounded fulfillment. Life at best is for me an untidy mess of unfinished business, broken achievements, personal failures, belated insights, noble desires, and shameful deeds. Hopefully, through the years I have accumulated a little wisdom; but for me life is incomplete and much potential remains; it eludes my mortal grasp. Life as an ongoing state has controlled me more than I it. Like most people, I've had my moments of breathtaking perfection, but no permanent achievement seems possible. This may be because as a human being I am only part of an evolutionary process whose task it is to till the soil, learn the rules, build the technology, and make ready for the people of the future, where necessity will require that basic human needs and wants be provided for by the collective of the community, and individuals will be set free from hampering emotions of jealousy, fear, and rivalry. The fact that people will also lose their ability to hate, love, have hope, or be generous will have little effect on the world of the future that will operate with ant like perfection into the millennia. Provided of course, that we don't blow ourselves off the face of the earth or drown in the slime of increased pollution in the interim.



For me, these alternatives are grim and bleak and leave so much to be desired that I've decided to become a charter member in the San Francisco Suicide Club. The only requirements are that I put my affairs in order, stop looking for satisfaction on a tomorrow that may never come, and live each day as though it were my last. With this commitment, I bequeath half of my worldly belongings to the club's trinary garage sale; these funds go to support the club's bizarre activities. Going places I've never been and doing things I've never done. Maybe I'll see you there!



Above: David Warren, aka Flammo Le Grande, doing his fire eating schtick as he worked the crowd at Union Square at his Friday the 13th event. Steve Mobia, wearing his infamous baby doll army helmet, sits in the background. Note the donation bottle and the sign. This was typical David, who was a door-to-door salesman supporting a family in the suburbs before he came to San Francisco and was the last of the Suicide Club organizers to embrace the no-money concept.



**THE MISSING CLOWN**

Steve Mobia

Gary Warne had been dead for three years and many in the Suicide Club had moved on with their lives — the pranks, street theater, and urban explorations faded into the background of daily life. But for a few of us, there was a lingering yearning for more.

In early October of 1986, I got a call and then later a ride out across the Golden Gate Bridge to Kirby Cove. Elaine Affronti and Jean Moshofsky from the old club were planning a Halloween tribute to Gary Warne. You see, there was this French movie by Louis Malle called *My Dinner with Andre*. The entire film was of a conversation in a restaurant where two very different individuals discussed the meaning of life. One of the described incidents told by Andre Gregory involved a mock funeral where people would be individually buried alive for a period of time. Elaine and Jean thought this experience would be a great initiation for the burgeoning group I had just heard about. Since at first no one had thought of a name for the group, they used the heading “Rough Draft” as a placeholder. Later the name settled on became “Cacophony Society,” although *Rough Draft* continued as title of the newsletter announcing the events.

Gary Warne had written a description of a Lon Chaney interview which depicted the “clown at midnight” as the essence of all horror. Elaine and Jean pointed to me: “We want you to be the clown.”

Their event was to be called “My Dinner With Gary.” The initial idea was this: the group would be led to an actual law office (Elaine was a lawyer and had access to such places), where individually, each would fill out an official “will.” Then the groups of people would be shuttled across the bridge to the old beachside bunkers at Kirby Cove, where they would descend a hill and each would be disrobed, bathed, dressed in a shroud, and then carried on a stretcher into a concrete chamber where a funeral would be held — including an individual eulogy based on the contents described each person’s will. After the funeral, the body would be placed from the stretcher into a coffin and the lid nailed shut. The coffin would then be carried by pallbearers down into a dank vine entwined chamber, covered in shoveled dirt and left alone for 20 minutes. Afterward, the lid would be pried open by a gravedigger and the newly resurrected would be led to a circular brick tunnel through which a bonfire would be seen on the beach at the other end. After all the people assembled around the bonfire, a lone figure would peer



down at them from a distant hill. This figure would be “the clown at midnight.”

“Sounds great,” I said, rather bemused at their ambitious undertaking, “but I don’t have a clown costume.” I also stressed that to pull this off they’d need many people to assist. Elaine and Jean assured me they’d have enough help. I suggested that I’d rather work on the funeral and burial music and assist with the resurrection.

The month went by quickly and it was startling to get a call from Elaine, who reminded me that Halloween was fast approaching. Though it had rained that week, Halloween night was uncannily warm and very dark from the new moon. I arrived at Kirby Cove to see only Jude, Elaine’s son, and his friends setting up tents for the disrobing and bathing. The concrete entombment chamber was prepared and I had brought a recording of quiet distant bells to play for the buried. Upstairs, Tom Spears, the undertaker, had done a great job with the chapel. The bunker walls were covered with graffiti over the years and now flickering candle-filled luminarias lit the shadowy forms (including a rather large scrawled

Above: Steve Mobia at a “Playland Lives” event in Golden Gate Park, 1977. Facing page: Bill Kostura, Mark Northcross, Steve White, and Jean Moshofsky on the Bay Bridge, 1981. The club members climbed the two primary Bay Area bridges literally hundreds of times, as well as bridges in New York City and elsewhere.

“Satan”). Sentimental organ music echoed through the interior. Tom would later get the wills and prepare his eulogy for each with his characteristic panache.

Finally, two pine coffins arrived. Empty, each one weighed 150 pounds or so. But who was to carry them down the steps and into the chamber, once bodies were inside? Well, various assistants started arriving. Most had no idea what they would be involved with. There were these three French guys I hadn’t seen before, who thought they were going to a Halloween party. Little did they know they’d be spending the night struggling with coffins. I forgot to ask them if they’d ever seen *My Dinner with Andre*.

This was hardly a party. The whole mood of the event was somber and introspective. Not being a party guy, I very much enjoyed this alternative to the typical Halloween drinking fest. But the assistants had other ideas.

After the first few bodies exited the funeral parlor, it was clear that we had logistical problems. The four pallbearers standing with a coffin between them could not fit through the chamber door. It was hastily decided that the coffins would not be carried downstairs but placed just outside the chapel: much less effort, but it afforded the newly resurrected a glimpse “behind the scenes” that bothered me. Later, the French pallbearers went “on strike” and we had to recruit the newly resurrected to labor with the coffins of the dead. This made the final walk through the tunnel to the beach a bit awkward — who was to stay and help and who got to walk through the tunnel? I had dressed in my grandfather’s red robe and guided some

with a lantern to the tunnel. But once through it and onto the beach, they were left standing in the dark — we didn’t have time to build the bonfire and the clown never materialized.

Despite my own misgivings about the organization of this initiation, it apparently worked for many who participated. I even heard that some broke into tears while filling out their wills. The whole event lasted until 3am.

After all had left, I packed my equipment, hoping someone would return to help me carry it. Alone, I wondered the deserted beach, thinking of Gary and what he would’ve thought of this.

I grew tired and laid down in one of the coffins. It was an exhausting experience to process that many people (I think there were at least thirty). It was surprisingly comfortable inside the pine box, and I drifted off quickly.

A loud clang woke me up before dawn with a strong wind blowing through the bunker hall, slamming the heavy steel doors. It was pitch dark. A large animal of some kind was snorting outside my coffin and I pulled the lid over me for protection. To scare it off, I slammed my fists on the wood and yelled. Then silence outside. After waiting a few more minutes, I slid the lid open, sat up and grabbed a nearby flashlight. I had imagined Gary Warne standing by the bunker entrance wearing a clown costume and I’d say he was late. But the chamber was empty except for whirling leaves carried by the breeze.



SEPTEMBER - 1986

## WHAT IS ROUGH DRAFT ?

### ROUGH DRAFT

A preliminary outline for expanding the limits of fun and creativity....  
A chance for new and unusual opportunities for intense experiences.....  
'to stretch the limits---push the envelope'  
ROUGH DRAFT and when it works - it works !

Louis M. Brill

I see this as a kind of participatory pre-school for adults, in that it can be an outlet to get together for any type of activity that is self-expressive, explores the world in a new way, or is just plain fun. I would like to see it be a supportive forum where anybody feels comfortable putting on an event or class, and a group where people feel comfortable playing with different creative processes even if the product doesn't come out to be hip and polished.

Saffron

Reality is more fun than anything you can imagine

Joe Weinstein

Rough Draft is a place where displaced extraterrestrials, dreamers, artists, urban necromancers, inspired game players, esoteric scholars, wandering spirits, playful adults and wiley children can explore their ideas and desires, and present them without restrictions. It is a place to subvert our own and other peoples shopworn personal realities.

Lance Alexander

I'm going into this with very little expectation. Surprise me.

Sandy Hatch

ROUGH DRAFT is a clearinghouse / newsletter where anyone who wants to do anything that would involve people in a creative, novel or participatory activity can list it. These can be events, performances, classes, projects, ...or whatever you want. The process is openended and and by coming to an event or listing one in the newsletter, you become an active and equal partner in the creation of ROUGH DRAFT

ROUGH DRAFT has no rules, no meetings, no officers, and no permanent staff. There is no consensus about what it is or where its going. Right now it's a name and an address. It is extremely open ended and invites active participation.

To participate send us a write-up of your event, class, project or whatever. All we ask is.

- 1) Make it clear to the participants what you want them to do: where you want them to meet, at what time, what they should bring or where they should write or call, etc. Be specific.
- 2) Have your write-up and/or illustrations camera ready so that all the newsletter editor has to do paste it down to the newsletter and xerox it. Failure to do this could conceivably lead to errors unintentional or otherwise by the editor, for which he will take absolutly NO responsibility.
- 3) We ask that no organized religious or political groups use ROUGH DRAFT to spread their fetishes and obsessions. We're not here to propagandize people.
- 4) Be responsible. What goes around, comes around.
- 5) The deadline for the next newsletter is Sept. 19th.  
Send write-ups to:

ROUGH DRAFT  
BOX 199  
904 Irving St.  
San Francisco, CA  
94122



## Rethinking Cacophony: The Lance Factor

"The original idea behind Cacophony was to empower individuals to manifest their dreams, desires and obsessions in some creative way that could be shared as an event. It was a call to create our own version of art and culture." — Lance Alexander

Lance was blindfolded, his hands bound in shiny silver handcuffs behind his back. Sebastian Melmoth and Ethyl Ketone propelled him, holding an elbow each, over the cracked sidewalks of one of the city's most dangerous neighborhoods. They had almost made it to the grimy ghetto theater where Hellraiser was playing when Ethyl saw two cops coming at them, pistols aimed in their direction. She blanched, and Sebastian hissed, "Crap, they're pulling a pincer move on us."

"Hey," one of the cops said, "Are you all right?" Melmoth started to respond, but the cop, fingering his .38 caliber police special, said, "Shut up! I'm asking the one with the bag over his head."

Lance seriously considered saying, "They're kidnapping me, help!" Instead, he said, "It's all right, officers. They're my friends, and I believe they're taking me to a movie." The cop looked at Melmoth and Ketone and said, "You better get him off the street. This is a bad neighborhood to be blind in."

Lance had been blind for over an hour, since they had hooded, abducted, and trundled him into Steve Mobia's Luxor Cab. They sped a circuitous route through the city to disguise their destination, the three abductors exchanging cryptic comments along the way. Finally, needing to return to actual paying fares, Mobia dropped them off at the corner of Taylor and Eddy Streets. Lance couldn't see, but he could smell. The human perfume told him they were in the Tenderloin.

The three friends stumbled around the corner and into the Electric Theater at 980 Market Street. Lance was having

a surreal experience, but it got stranger. A bum in the back of the theater shouted out "HOW'S IT GOING, BIRTHDAY BOY?" several times during the onscreen bloodletting. More than a little shaken, Lance asked his abductors, "How the hell does he know it's my birthday?"



The Luxor abduction vehicle was waiting outside when the movie ended, and Steve dropped the three at a seedy bar on the north end of the "Loin." They sat at the bar and discussed the vibrant, lurid universe depicted on the screen and their close encounters with the very similar, but much more real world outside the relative safety of the smelly and run-down theater.

Looking around the bar, Ethyl commented on the number of exotically accessorized, immaculately coiffed, model thin, and tall women there were in this unprepossessing venue. Melmoth said, "Ethyl, you are the only woman in the Black Rose Bar tonight, or for that matter, on almost any night."

"Kidnapping" your friend(s) was a common pastime for Cacophonists when not engaged in actual newsletter sanctioned events. The surreal quality revealed through sensory deprivation, while engaging in experiences that might be as common as viewing a movie or as daring as dangling out one hundred feet on a cable swing beneath an old arch bridge as your blindfold was removed, could be in some cases life altering. New and unexpected experiences were catnip for those in the group. The stranger and more involved, the better. The

November 7, 1990

The San Francisco Cacophony Society is now somewhat over four years old. It's very survival astounds me; it's success even more so. Apparently we are on the right track and have the right people participating. Nevertheless, in the midst of this success I am beginning to hear a nagging question. I first heard it in my own mind some months ago. Later I heard it from Wanda Hoberg, the writer who is doing the story for The City magazine. Most recently I have heard it from a variety of people involved with Cacophony.

The question goes something like this: Cacophony seems to have a number of serious, intelligent people involved in it. People who are willing to spend time, money and energy creating unusual events to share with each other and the public. Yet despite all of this I can't see what it adds up to. What's the philosophy or purpose behind the organization? What are you trying to achieve? Is there a coherent purpose that guides the actions of the people who put on the events and where will it lead the group in future?

Hidden or personal agendas aside, what is the answer to these questions?

In an attempt to satisfy my own curiosity on the subject as well as provide a forum for the discussion of the SFCS's future I would like you to participate in a conference letter on the subject. Here's how it works:

- 1) write me a letter telling me what you think is the answer to any or all of the above questions, It can be as long or as short as you want it to be, Mail it to me by December 15th.
- 2) Upon receipt of these letters I will copy all of them, just as I have received them, and mail a complete set of them to each of the participants.
- 3) The participants are then ask to write comments or rebuttals to the original letters and mail them to me by January 15th.
- 4) I will then copy these and mail copies to all respondents.

The reason that I have decided to ask this question in a written format as opposed to getting together in a group over beers and discussing it is that I hope that having to answer the questions in writing will give people an opportunity to carefully think out their answers at length and in some detail. Also it allows all of the people involved to have an equal voice. It keeps the more strident and argumentative types ( Who me ? ) from dominating the conversation and not paying attention to the more quiet and thoughtful members of the group. Finally, written statements will give the respondents time to carefully read and consider their fellow society member's remarks at length and appreciate all of their genius and all of it's ramifications.

By way of getting the discussion rolling, some of my own concerns center around several topics, One is the question of participation versus entertainment or parties as events. A second is the tension that exists between control and spontaneity that exists in a group with an essentially anarchistic structure. A third is the question of whether or not the group could perhaps accommodate a number of well defined special interest factions within it with out fragmenting.

Finally, I have chosen those people who I am sending this to not because they are the leaders of, or have any authority over, Cacophony. I have chosen them because of their level of interest and activity in the group. Most probably, the real reason is that I made my choice in a thoroughly arbitrary and personal manner, choosing people who I find interesting and whose opinions I would enjoy reading. As such this is a personal project, (perhaps it's an event) and I make no claim for it as any sort of 'official' Cacophony project.

The following people have been ask to participate in this conference letter:

|                  |                    |                      |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Carrie Galbraith | John Law           | Michael <sup>2</sup> |
| Dean Gustafson   | Louise Jarmilowicz | Kevin Evans          |
| P. Segal         | Larry Harvey       | Rob                  |
| Jayson           | Charlie Sweeney    | Louis Brill          |

If you feel that I have left anyone important off of the list please copy this letter and pass it on to them.

Hope to hear from you soon...

DAVE WARREN!

best events and outings were never merely 'fun.' They involved new knowledge, unknown views, and vantages that could be frightening and, in some cases, had a real element of danger.

The adventures and spirit the Suicide Club conjured up were fresh in the memory of a number of former members. They wanted action and adventure and intended to start making some of their own, but in a somewhat different way.

Jean Moshofsky, Louise Jarmilowicz, and Lance Alexander came up with the name for a new adventure group by riffing on various possibilities while walking down the street. When Lance blurted out "Cacophony Society," both women shouted, "That's it!" startling the normally reserved Lance.

The monthly newsletter, ended up with the perfect name as well. No one could come up with a 'real' name for the mailer, so *Rough Draft* stuck and was eventually acknowledged as the ideal title for the publication.

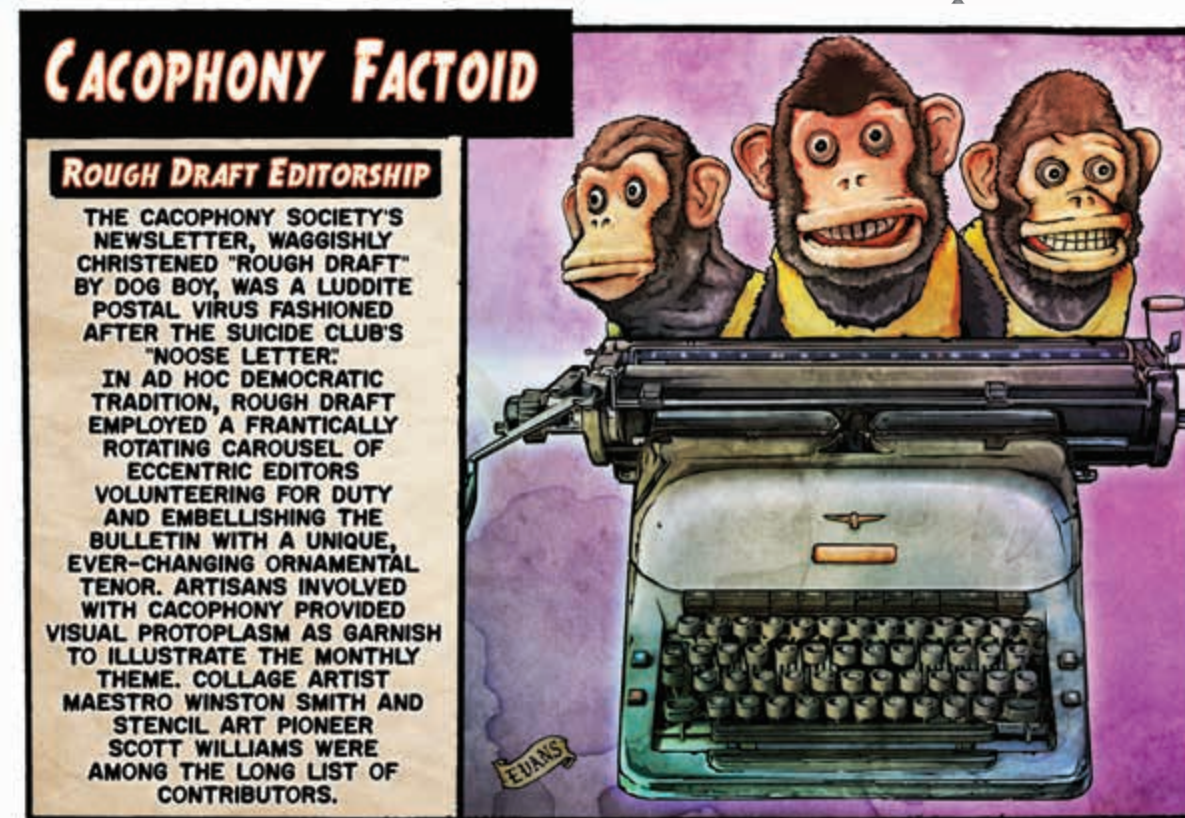
The first official Cacophony Society meeting was comprised of Jean Moshofsky, Sandy Hatch, Sarah 'Saphron' Jeziorski, Joe Weinstein, John 'R.H. Pepper' Dowdell, Louis Brill and Lance Alexander. Following soon as new members were: Louise Jarmilowicz, Jim Khennedy, Jayson Wechter, Jane Solis, John Law, and others from the defunct Suicide Club.

No one expected or really wanted to recreate the old Suicide Club. Many of the events could not be intentionally replicated or manufactured. A new agenda and new ideas were needed.

The pitfalls experienced in the Suicide Club, the growing paranoia about the authorities, fear of media attention and the consequent decrease in new members due to lack of visibility, were some of the things that needed to go. Lance Alexander was mulling these and other questions over as he considered ways to retain and/or replicate the things that had worked before, while ditching those which had not.

Cacophony would not experience these problems in the same fashion due in part to Lance Alexander's thoughtful and well-reasoned correspondence with other Society organizers. Lance initiated an in-depth group analysis of just what Cacophony was and what it might become. The subsequent 'rough draft' philosophy Lance cobbled together and then filtered through his fellow Cacophonists, formed the backbone of the new group.

Lance ended up writing the closest thing Cacophony ever had to a manifesto. His understanding of the type of person attracted to something like Cacophony coupled with his filtering of Gary Warne's vision and philosophy enabled Lance to put something as amorphous and hard to pin down as Cacophony into words.



Facing page: Original Letter to Fellow Cacophonists about Rethinking Cacophony, 1990.



What Made the SFSC Special

1. The SFSC was open to just about anything. It had an almost total lack of official rules and structure, something rarely found out side of one's inner life. The attitude was one of " Do whatever you want to do and list it in the newsletter. The official position was one of openness, experimentation, and non-judgement.
2. Originally there seemed to be a conscious realization that the club would be out of control. This out of control situation was then seen as a desirable norm.
3. The emphasis was on participation.
4. A willingness to entertain people's events without expectations as to their value. Conversely the willingness of those putting on the events to defy all expectations of good taste, what's right or correct, what is moral, proper, lawful, or legal. What was done was a matter of personal conscience and responsibility (and more than an occasionally, of irresponsibility).
5. The focus was on taking risks; physical, social, psychological and artistic... to change and expand the conception of the world held both by the event's originators and participants.
6. It was an attack on all limits.
7. It managed, through one of its few rules, to avoid political and religious contention and infighting that is forever the bane of creative enterprises.

In short the SFSC provided a forum for the realization of peoples fantasies, a place for the expression of outlaw artistic and intellectual conceptions, and a mode for exploring our own minds and our interaction with others. In setting aside limits and taking risks the SFSC in fact created a safe space for creative people to do whatever they pleased, a world apart though contiguous with the restrictive daily world. A world where our most obscure desires could be explored and acted out, either symbolically or in fact.

Another important aspect of the SFSC was that it made individuals who did become involved feel as if they were a part of something special. They felt that they were in a group of like minded people who stood somehow apart from society in general. A number of people who I've talked to felt that they were outsiders and that the SFSC was a very special group of people who were all outsiders in one way or another. To some extent the secret/conspiratorial aspect of the SFSC was important to this sense of a special identity. People who were initiated into the club were, as it were, initiated into a mystery/secret, and this was important as a glue that bonded the group together.

-----

Well. that's it, just as it was written in a frantic burst of composition fueled by my desire to convince my co-conspirators that while we wanted to form a new organization, what we did not want to do was create a carbon copy of the SFSC. Unfortunately, I don't think that I was entirely successful. All too many times have I heard, 'that's been done already' or 'I remember when, back in the old days...'. Oh well, nice try anyway....

Lance Alexander  
edited & retyped, 1-14-'91

## An Introductory Note

One evening in August of 1986 Louis Brill called me to say that a number of people from the defunct San Francisco Suicide Club were getting together to talk about doing some events ( the catch word that we used to describe our adventures, projects, and pranks) and ask me if I would like to join them. We met in a coffee house and talked over old times and future plans. If I remember correctly we were: Jean Moshofsky, Sandy Hatch, Sara (Saffron) Jeziorski, Joe Weinstein, John (Pepper) Dowdell, Louis Brill, and myself.

During the meeting it occurred to me that while I liked the idea of getting together again to do some events and perhaps even form a group again, I wanted to avoid some of the problem that I had encountered in the SFSC. In particular I wanted to avoid the clannish exclusivity that had grown up in that group as well as the incestuousness and non-participation that had developed.

Now, I had never done an event in the Suicide Club. I had gone on events and had helped other people, but was mainly a follower. This time I decided to get into the center of things. I went home and the next day and wrote up the attached remarks to present to my friends when we met again in a few days. Originally it had included much detailed criticism of the Suicide Club, but at Sandy's suggestion I cut most of this out and tried to focus attention on positive ideas. My criticisms were discussed with the group but never presented to them in written form. My idea in doing this was to promote some serious, conscious thought about what we were doing rather than just copy the past. To that extent it worked. While Cacophony has a resemblance to the SFSC it has succeeded in creating it's own identity and quirky style. If this critique contributed to that then it served it's purpose and that makes me happy.

At the meeting where we discussed these questions, I managed to get myself appointed editor of the newsletter, secretary, and treasurer by sheer force of egotism and bad manners, an attitude that I maintained for the thirteen months of my editorship.

Sandy Hatch helped extensively on the first issue, and Elliot Goliger on the second. Louise Jarmilowicz became the art director and then the second editor, after I resigned. Since then editorship has changed several times when someone else has demanded to participate. Anarchistically, we let them have the whole thing including the key to the cash box.

The copy of the 'rough draft manifesto' that has been attached to this is in the main the same as the one given out in '86. I have cleaned up the spelling to the best of the ability of my typewriter's spell-checker and have put in some short notes and added a few words here and there so it will make better sense to someone who was not in the original group or the SFSC.

Also I have attached a copy of what came out of our discussion of event guidelines. It was given out to subscribers to the newsletter for a number of years and some version of it may still be (hey, so I'm a little out of touch !). It's in large part derived from an earlier page of suggestions written by an SFSC member and which I used with his approval.

Lance Alexander

P.S. The newsletter, and originally the group, was known as "Rough Draft" 'cause when people wanted to know what to call it, Louis overruled all of the lame suggestions and pointed to the apologetic title on the top of the first page.

The name stuck, if only for the newsletter.

Lance Alexander  
1377 11th Avenue  
San Francisco, CA  
94122

November 6, 1990

Wanda Hoberg  
The City  
The City Building,  
1095 Market Street  
San Francisco, CA  
94122

Hello Wanda,

Here's the information about Cacophony that I said I would get for you. Since I talked with you last Tuesday I have given some thought to the question that you asked me. I looked into my files and found the notes for an essay on why I do events. This, I think, will your questions better than my rambling monologue.

#### Why I Do Events

I can only speak for myself and not as a spokesman for the SFCS. After giving some thought to the question I have found that there several reasons that I do events:

- 1) Creating imaginative events grew out of a profound dissatisfaction with mediated experience. Too much of modern life is lived second hand by way of words and images that are provided to us by the information and entertainment media. One begins to think other's thoughts, dream other's dreams and live other's lives. This crowds out one's real life and attempts to substitute for it. One ends up as a spectator to the world and to one's life. This is boring and ultimately robs one of initiative, imagination, originality and any sense of self as a causative and creative of one's own life.
- 2) I have a sincere desire to emulate, in my own way, those people I see as creative and adventurous.
- 3) I enjoy losing myself in intense experiences with a particular desire for novelty and the sublime.
- 4) I enjoy initiating other people into those realms of experience that enlarge their and my sense of life and it's nearly unlimited and unexplored (and sadly often unimagined and unimaginable) possibilities.

Creating events allows me to explore certain unarticulated desires, dreams and obsessions that have manifested themselves in a latent and limited way in my daily life. New ideas and roles can be acted out in events and their results seen in the reaction to the participants. The event becomes a sort of laboratory where the mind can interact with the world in a playful way. Archetypal roles and situations can be acted out, examined, modified, burlesqued, challenged, destroyed; pleasures and dreams amplified; obsessions artistically indulged; rebellions carried out. Knowledge, pleasure, and freedom are the goals; their limits the enemy.

An event should embody some of these ideas and feelings. It is not necessarily safe. Some sort of risk should be inherent. The game must be worth the candle. Moreover it must have a certain integrity of motive. To do an event just to do an event. just for something to do, is a pain and is often boring to both it's creator and to the participants. The same goes double for copying events and trying to be clever. Good events should be rooted in one's life and desires and the results should further these.

An event should also get an authentic reaction out of people. I don't care if people love my events or hate them. I want to do something that gets a real reaction and not just a lukewarm "Well it was ok, but I'd just as soon go to a club."

As such an event is not just an entertainment, it has a meaning for the person putting it on and should convey some of that meaning to the participants. This is not to deny the social aspects of the event, merely to say that these should not be their only reason for existing. If that's what you want to do maybe you should throw a party...

Finally, allowing myself one historical touchstone, here is a quote from André Breton that sheds some light on why I do events.

If he still retains a certain lucidity, all he can do is turn back toward his childhood which, however his mentors may have botched it, still strikes him as somehow charming. There, the absence of any known restrictions allows him the perspective of several lives lived at once; this illusion becomes firmly rooted within him; now he is only interested in the fleeting; the extreme facility of everything. Children set off each day without a worry in the world. Everything is near at hand, the worst material conditions are fine. The woods are white or black, one will never sleep.

But it is true that we would not dare venture so far. It is not merely a question of distance. Threat is piled upon threat, one yields, abandons a portion of the terrain to be conquered. This imagination which knows no bounds is henceforth allowed to be exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of an arbitrary utility; it is incapable of assuming this inferior role for long and, in the vicinity of the twentieth year, generally prefers to abandon man to his lusterless fate.

This state of mind and being, this lusterless fate, is what I am fighting against. Events should liberate the imagination, desires, dreams and spirit of both the creators and the participants. The type of person attracted to Cacophony then is one that feels this same need to recapture those portions of their mind and life that have been suppressed and appropriated and sold back to them in a comodified, mediated form. To participate in Cacophony is to demand the return of your dreams, and desires and nothing less.

I hope this serves to both clarify and amplify my previous remarks, and I hope that you enjoy reading the enclosed materials. Among them are a copy of the querulous essay I wrote when we first met to found the society in '86 and a copy of a part the first newsletter which has the founding members thoughts on what the SFCS should be.

ROUGH DRAFT  
(apologies for spelling and typos)

"Anyone who does anything original never repeats themselves. And if you're original and clever you can do the same things and change them enough so they don't have the same repeated effect...so it's not a copy of what you've done before.

Mark Pauline

#### SOME NOTES ON ORGANIZING EVENTS: a personal view.

##### Intro

The San Francisco Suicide Club (SFSC) was the resultant product of a long process that started with the broad range of people, ideas and projects represented in Communiversity. Personally I'm interested in re-initiating the open ended evolutionary process that involves creative people and allows them to interact in a relatively unstructured manner. What I would like to see, in short, is a forum for the realization of peoples fantasies, a place for the realization of outlaw artistic and intellectual cinceptions. and a mode for exploring our own minds and our interactions with others. A setting aside of limits, and taking real risks to create a space where people can do what they please, a world apart though contiguous with the restrictive world of daily life, a world where our most obscure desires and obsessions could be explored and acted out, either symbolically or in fact.

I am interested in reviving the process and not a not a specific product, the latter SFSC. Reviving this product with it's unwritten, tacit structure and assumptions would, I'm afraid, not be half as interesting or as likely to succeed.

What follows are some of my thoughts on what could make this new venture a great success.

##### Getting Started

the goal as I see it is to create an open ended situation that is conducive to the development of a semi-coherent, motivated, self-startin and self-perpetuating group of people willing to design and participate in a variety of projects / events / classes. Conversely the question could be, "How do we go about starting up a group and at the same time avoid those problems that lead to the non-participation and stagnation in the SFSC. I confess that I don't have an all encompassing answer. But I do have some concrete suggestions that could be examined and perhaps tried.

##### Personal Recruitment of Interesting, Creative, People

Instead of waiting for exceptional people to come to us and offer ideas we should actively and personally recruit them. Personal contact and inter-action is a key element to putting together a good group. A newsletter or flyer seldom motivates people as well as one-to-one contact and communication does.

#### Encouragement of a Wide Variety of Events, Projects, & Classes

Through one-to-one contact and through the newsletter let people know that we are open to and accepting of a wide variety of activities. Another way to make the point would be for us to do a wide variety of activities ourselves, avoiding repetition, as an example of the potential of the group and situation.

##### Stage Open-Ended Events

Make it a point to regularly design and schedule open-ended events that encourage participation and responsibility for the direction and the outcome of the event. (Example: patchwork quilt events.)

(Note: A patchwork quilt event is one where each participant is expected to have contrived a small event of short duration which will, along with the events of the others be carried out on the same evening with the participation all of the others.)

##### Events that Lead to Bonding / Friendship / Trust / Group Solidarity

People need to feel that they belong to the group, that they are not just spectators, and that what they do is important and respected. When people feel that they are accepted and paid attention to they will continue to come to events, feel encouraged to do events, and take risks (just ask any cult leader).

Sandy's idea that we could initially do some small events that are unannounced, to which we personally invite interesting people is a good one. Also good are events that allow people to get together to know one another (Examples: "Lock yourselves in a small room and see if you can agree on anything", "Telling your own story"). Events where everyone participates equally (Saffron's mask making group). and events that use self revealing psychological games are both good for fostering those personal contacts that lead to full participation in the group and a commitment to the process.

Another useful idea is for a specific ritual for the new members of the group. "Enter the Unknown " was a prime example of this.

(Note: Enter the Unknown was the initiatory event used by the SFSC. Different each time it involved people participating in an event where they had no idea what was going to happen Often it tended toward some sort of suspenseful ordeal where everyone except the leaders were blindfolded.)

(Parenthetically, any event where people are isolated and on edge, and either in the dark or blindfolded for a prolonged period tends to foster feelings on intimacy and trust)

##### Sharing Fantasies, Assumptions, Goals

Design events / classes / get togethers that allow people to share their concept of what they are trying to accomplish within the overall group. To encourage them to see if their ideas generate any energy or are shared by other people.

##### Mailing List

Recruit initially from new sources and then develop a mailing list of intrested people. Give the situation a few months before bringing in a whole slew fo people from the old SFSC / Gorilla Grotto nexus, people who have perhaps already fallen into the passive, spectator role or have a desire to dig up and revive the rotting corpse of the long deceased SFSC and try to bring

it back to life.

#### Interfacing with Other Groups

New members and new ideas could be had by interfacing with already existing groups we find interesting. This could be done openly or surreptitiously (infiltration).

#### The Newsletter

I expect that a monthly newsletter is still the best way of letting people know about events. But the newsletter could be more than a calendar.

I envision it as a means of communication among the members of the group, a place to share ideas enthusiasms, obsessions, fetishes... as a forum for debate... as a place to ask for information and help with projects.. as a showcase for art and writing... in other words more of a journal than a newsletter...something that can incite dreams and action as well as list events. A means of two way communication...with comments and critiques of events and attitudes... a means of feedback and of starting fights.

The newsletter could also act as a skills exchange either as a means of payment for a costly class / event, or as a way of paupent for locating people with skills needed to facilitate a project or event.

It would be interesting to have the various active participants write short to medium length statements about what they are trying to accomplish by doing classes / events / projects...what their conceptual background is, what interests or obsessions led to an event or a style of doing things, past experiences, etc. (We could start doing this in the second newsletter and the following ones.)

(This may be to much to expect out of a monthly newsletter and its rotating publisher and editors...Perhaps it would be worthwhile to put together a quarterly journal to handle the longer prices of writing,

I would be willing to handle this on a permanent basis for at least the first year.)

#### THE QUESTION OF STRUCTURE

The relatively unstructured format of the SFSC was what made it special. But it also allowed for the development of an unwritten and often unacknowledged structure, the inadvertent domination of events by a few individuals and rank non-participation by others. So I've ask myself as well as some ex-members if they thought some kind of non-intrusive, benign format or structure might be useful. There was no consensus on this and I do not have any answer. But I do think that the question is important and deserves considerable thought and some discussion.

#### SOME SUGGESTION AND QUESTIONS

##### Facilitators / Coordinators

A rotating position of facilitator or coordinator that would be passed to all of the members of the group at one time or another has been suggested. This person(s) would help to get events together, and assist with information about resources and individuals. They could also be charged with the job of making sure that all members had an equal voice and ability to participate.

##### Mandatory Participation Requirement

Put on or at least help put on at least one event per year or be barred from participation. Do we need a 'contribute or go home' rule ?

#### Guide lines and Written Information

Written material about: 1) Our conception of what we are trying to do individually and /or as a group. 2) How to stage an event, project, or class. Mainly suggestions with lots of examples of events of the past or planned for the future so as to show how wide our conception of events is. Should these materials be written ? Given to all members ? Be available on request?

#### No Politics / Religion Rule

One of the few rules of the SFSC seems to have been: "No overtly political organization events and no evangelizing for a religion." Is this a good rule, do we need it ?

#### Esoteric or Exoteric ?

The SFSC, though supposedly not a secret society had a tendency to function as one; it had a distinctly conspiratorial aspect. Do we want this ?

(Thanks to sandy for reading the very rough draft and making suggestions and contributing ideas.)



I wish to take seriously

I speak only for myself. this being as much a confession as a complaint, but not a confession of sin. Instead one of misplaced ambition, autocratic tendencies and a foolish unwillingness to walk away from the situation. After twelve years of being involved in putting on events with the SFSC and Cacophony I find that I am extremely bored. Bored with the the poverty of ideas and imagination, with the repetition of events either in their original form or in some thin disguise, bored with the lack of real challenges and real risk, the reliance on stale formula. This combined with the hyperbole of creating a new culture, the increased publicity and the development of an elite that speaks for the group and burden the creative attempts of new members with a weight of old form and unperceived dogma.

that which other people see as simply fun;

Asking around I find that most of the Cacophony members that I talk with see the group as a way to have fun and meet new people, as a social club for the eccentric, the bohemian and the would be bohemian. the fact that many of the events these days have a party type of format, where entertainment, food and alcohol seem to have taken the place of participation and risk. Increasingly events become more spectacular, better publicized, and better attended and at the same time more mundane. Private ambitions of the event organizers seem at times to have eclipsed the original idea of what the group was about.

Now this is not to say that I disapprove of these events. Frankly I like a good party as well as anyone and have been known to throw a few of them. I have even thrown partys thinly disguised as events when the Cacophony schedule was thin back when we first started. So while an occasional party is fine, they have come to dominate Cacophony and that is not what the organization was founded for. But it may be a problem of the anarchistic form of the organization that allows the simple tried events to dominate the schedule in a number of different guises. An organization without rules depends on the members conscience and consciouness of aesthetics to determine the quality of the events. The exceptional will be swamped by the average every time

and perhaps I am asking too much.

The original idea behind Cacophony was to empower individuals to manifest their dreams, desires and obsessions in some creative way that could be shared as an event. It was a call to create our own own version of art sand culture; to refuse to be entertained and demand to participate in and control our own dreams and their interpretation, rejecting the overdetermined and restrictive meanings supplied

by highly mediatred and comoditized culture. this is what I hoped taht it would do. Instead it has become another means of socialising and replicating the the hierarchy of the creative and the consumer of the created. I hoped that Cacophony would break down some of the barriers bertween art and life and between the creators of culture and the consumer of culture. It has been a disapointment in this aspect. It has been foolish of me to believe that it could be otherwise.

Now I am not going to try and pretend that my ideas always or at any time came close to the ideal that I have set forth here. A few of my events actually made an attempt at it. Some of the events I did were obviously filler for a thin schedule. Unfortunately it seems that my filler events have become more copied than the few where I tried to live up to my intentions.

And in the end that is what I ask for: I ask that people have some sort of clear intention, even if it's tentative, which guides their events. I wanted people to look to the conscious and unconscious desires, to their hopes and dreams, and from these form some intention that could be done as an event. I hoped for real desire and obsession and the dialogue that would arise between the creator/participants. Instead I find people aping the S.F.S.C. and each other.

Now it is obvious that I have hoped for too much and that I haven't work as hard as I could to see my own desires manifested. I am guilty of this and more. I am guilty of hanging around and bitching about a situation that is clearly not going to change. As such I am a pain in the ass and a spoilsport. A wet blanket too.

It is now obviouse to me that if I want to work to carry out some of the ideas I had when I originally worked to start Rough Draft (I have always hated the name Cacophony Society: the SFCS an echo of the SFSC) I am going to have to do it on mym own or with a few friends andd co-conspirators who share the same intaentions and convocations. .I want somthing that builds on itself in complexity and meaning, and I intend to get it.

So I apologize for my bad attitude. I am not abandoning Cacophony. You will see me on events. But I refuse to take it as seriously as I have in the past. Sure I will be glad to help you with an event or with publicity but don't expect me to tale it too seriously; especially not you inflated ideas of what the group is and its role as a subversion of the cultur and a creature of a new sort of culture. One has to tale serious physical, psychological and spiritual risks to do that (no, I don't consider playing tag with the cops as a real risk).

Well, I'm off to follow my obsessions wherever they lead. I will be seeing you around.

BRIDE 1070 CRITIQUE & CONFESSION

## AFTERWORD

You can see that I haven't written an answer to my own query. In fact I don't have one yet. As I have said, I am mainly interested in hearing what other people have to say about the Cacophony Society. In doing this I've had to reconsider a number of my own assumptions about what the society is and what it is doing.

From the beginning I've had an ambivalent relationship with Cacophony. This stems from my frustration with seeing that the organization has a vast potential for creativity and serious play, and by extension the fostering of creativity and the liberation of the human spirit. Re-creation in the best sense of the word. The frustration is one of not knowing how to go about optimizing this potential.

Most of the meaning and purpose that the Cacophony Society has lies with individuals, and with the singular and personal meanings that individuals give to the events that they put on. The meaning and purpose of the society then appears as the convergence (or divergence) of these individual meanings and purposes. As such no one is really in control and a sort of rough, pragmatic consensus is reached through the accommodation of various individual needs and desires. And yet there is an organization here that can provide both a form and a forum for the realization of these desires. It is the success and continued existence of the society as a form that supplies what other purpose and meaning it has.

My own idea of the Cacophony Society is that it exists to empower individuals to manifest their dreams, desires and obsessions in some creative way that could be shared as an event. It is a call to create our own version of art, culture and life; to refuse to be entertained and demand to participate in and control our own dreams and their interpretation, rejecting the overdetermined and restrictive meanings supplied by a highly mediated and commoditized culture. It should it will break down some of the barriers between art and life and between the creators of culture and the consumers of culture. To this end people must have some sort of clear intention, even if only tentative, which guides their events. To look to their conscious and unconscious desires, to their fancies and dreams, and from these form some intention that can be realized as an event. I dare to hope for real desire and obsession and the dialogue that would arise between the creator-participants.

As for fun and entertainment; don't get me wrong, I enjoy them. Nonetheless I view them as the side effects of doing something that really interests one. To try and have fun is chimerical. As for entertainment, it's all too easy to find...

Similarly, while the group is a social organization, I do not see this as its main purpose. All groups are social groups. This is as a rule not their stated purpose, but it is always a subtext. Most groups that claim to be merely social are in fact interested in either proselytizing or profit...

I do not intend this as the last word in this conversation. I hope that it will be the beginning of a long and fruitful conversation about our intentions and actions that will last as long as the organization.

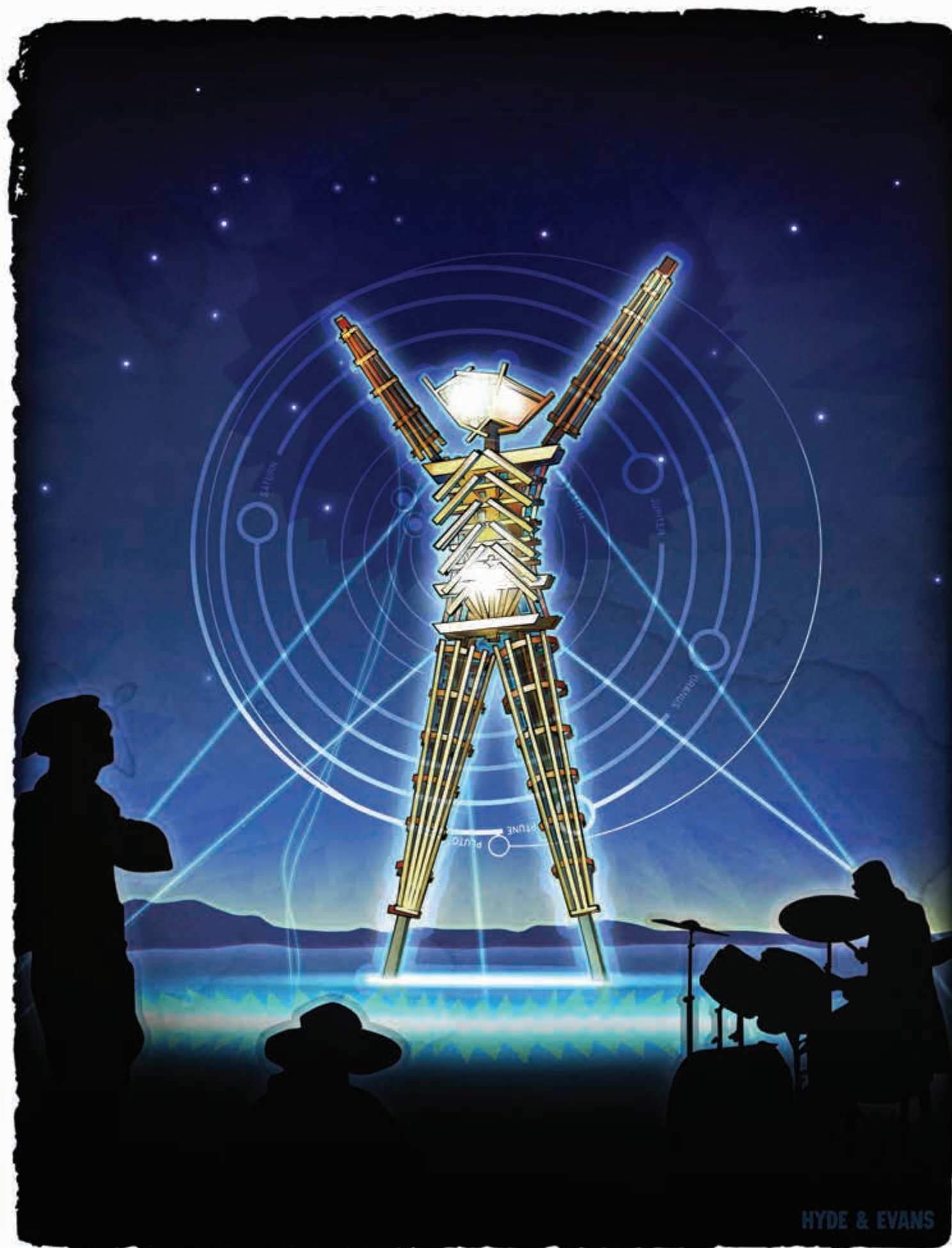
Thanks to all of you for your participation

Sincerely,

Lance Alexander

January 10, 1990





## Big Doings

“Meet the SF Cacophony Society, a randomly gathered network of free spirits. They are united in the pursuit of experiences beyond what they see as the pale of mainstream society. They are the Merry Pranksters of the 1990s.” —Wanda Hoberg, *The City Magazine*, February 1991

The caravan of cars pulled into Bruno’s Country Club in Gerlach, Nevada, population one hundred and ninety-five, just after dawn. After a filling breakfast of coffee, hot cakes, eggs, and bacon, the checkered crew poured themselves back into their sketchy vehicles and left the remote desert hamlet, heading toward the even more remote, off-road environs of the Black Rock Desert. The early risers in Gerlach wondered what that posse of city types was doing on their turf: one speculation was that a group of Frisco Satanists had just blown through town, heading up playa for some inscrutable and dark rite. The motley caravan made the pre-determined turnoff from Washoe County Road 34, at a location marked by tires stacked on the side of the road, onto the trackless great playa. At a signal, the vehicles stopped and everyone got out. A long line was drawn with a stick on the desert floor. The group joined hands, and, stepped over the line as one, and into The Zone.

A lone Santa sprinted desperately down Market St. around midnight, on Saturday, December 12th, 1995, his cheap, ill-fitting, and prison made red suit clinging to his sweat drenched body. Behind him, over a hundred Santa Clauses

ran in hot pursuit, shouting, “Kill the scab Santa” and “Die Santa, Die,” finally tackling him at the Powell Street cable car turnaround. They crammed a noose over the bad Santa’s head, tossed a rope over a street light, and hung him in front of the now defunct Emporium department store. The police broke up an intended celebratory stop at the Gold Dust Lounge on Powell St., and about 50 Clauses leaped onto a 38 Geary bus. They almost escaped, but police cars stopped the bus and funneled the Santas out the back door. The un-amused police pulled at each fake beard, searching flushed faces for a match to a Santa who’d had a tug-of-war with security guards at the Emporium over a wreath and a velvet partition rope. Two Santas were handcuffed and taken away, as fellow Kringles gawked in dumb amazement.



Several Cacophony events became annual affairs and started taking on lives of their own. Some events evolved out of collaborations with others and mutated into entirely different phenomena, such as Burning Man. Some, like the Santa Rampage (Santarchy, SantaCon), grew into massive, leaderless, manifestations through the newly minted miracle of Internet social networking.

Above: Moments after crossing an arbitrary line drawn on the desert floor, members of Cacophony step Into The Zone and mug for a “Raising of the Flag at Iwo Jima” moment at the 11 mile turnoff onto the Black Rock Playa. Facing page: Illustration by Sebastian Hyde and Kevin Evans.



Santa Chad's original Santa concept included some sharp jabs at holiday commercialism; this playful holiday jest gave way, over the years, to dumbed-down Santa attacks, essentially mass pub-crawls in red suits. The remaining wonder of this event is evident in the ridiculously huge numbers of Santas that participate annually. The Cacophony event listed in *Rough Draft*, which gathered thirty-three Santas in 1994 and a hundred in 1995, now attracts tens of thousands worldwide.

Big ideas were often hatched at the salon, apartment, and artists' haven presided over by the ever-serene P Segal. This labyrinthine, two story Golden Gate Avenue flat, known simply as 1907, was at various times home to as many as a dozen starving Cacophonists, and it entertained dozens more on a daily basis. The big move for Burning Man, from its humble Baker Beach beginning to the trackless reaches of the Black Rock Desert, was plotted at 1907 in 1990. Sewer walks, giant salmon attacks, Santa Rampages, Zone Trips, theater, pranks, kidnappings, and surprises of every stripe were plotted and planned around the kitchen table in this crumbling Edwardian mansion. Miss P, as she was affectionately called, hosted innumerable Cacophony events and parties at this singular address.

38

The first art car gatherings in San Francisco were sponsored by Cacophony. In the waning days of the '80s, Cacophony art car events like The Carmonic Convergence

and The 49 Mile Psychotic Road Rally brought together isolated car artists to share automotive techniques, surreal detailing tips, and lore for their beloved hand modified automobiles. Art cars are now a well-known and generally beloved part of the American psyche.

Cacophonous influences on the culture at large are visible through the international recognition of symbols perpetrated by event ideas, like the naughty Santa or the Burning Man. Not least among these symbols were the iconic and zoomorphic reminders of a former local restaurant chain, the Doggie Diner dog heads. Three huge, smiling dachshund heads wearing chef hats, and loaded on a flatbed truck, became totems at events, parades, and happenings around the Bay Area. Beatified by Bishop Joey of The First Church of the Last Laugh in 1990, the Doggie Diner heads became the most visible mascots of the Cacophony Society.

Intellectual and mystic Peter Lamborn Wilson, known as Hakim Bey, attracted Cacophony's interest and provided the most comprehensive description of how the group affected the culture around it. Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) philosophy, and Ethyl Ketone's ruminations on "The Zone," gave perspective to what Cacophony was organically manifesting through the Zone Trips of in the late '80s and early '90s: the beginnings of some very Big Doings.



Above: The Holy Trinity of the Dogminican Order in front of the last Doggie Diner restaurant, The Carousel, on Sloat Blvd. and 48th Ave. "Buick of Unconditional Love," driven by Art Car Festival co-founder Philo Northrup. Facing page: M2 and other Cacophony members on the cover of *City Magazine*, March 1991. The feature article was the first in-depth coverage on Cacophony and Burning Man.



# CROSS OVER IN TO THE CACOPHONY ZONE

*and don't forget your flashlight*

BY WANDA HOBERG

A caravan of 70 San Franciscans, cruising a desolate highway in Northern Nevada, halts in a swirl of dust at the edge of a dry lake bed. Car doors open and everyone piles out. With the toe of his cowboy boot, a man draws a long line on the arid desert floor. The group gathers silently along one side and grabs hands. One, two, three... as a single entity they step across the line. "Yahoo!" "Yeah man, we're here!"

They've entered the Cacophony Zone.

The caravan drives on across the dead lake, a gold Volvo coupe leading the way, a sand storm billowing in its wake. In the middle of nowhere, the caravan stops again; cars, trucks, and vans form a circular encampment, creating a tiny village in the barren desert.

"Lawrence of Arabia" erects his domed pup tent. Across the compound, Louise, in yellow and pink harem garb, spreads lambswool rugs beneath a canopy. Nancy tends to her pots of cacti. "They had to come along, this is their home," she informs. Phil dons Arab headgear. Margo parades by with a parasol, but Margo is only Margo when she wears her long black wig, so for now she is Jane. For this event anyone can be anyone and many go by nom de guerres. Props are part of the trip, but then it isn't just a trip, it's a Cacophony event.

As "Moses" puts down his divining rod, the coolers appear and the beers start to disappear. Next to the camp Larry Harvey supervises the building of a gigantic wooden man. Sven plays drums and Ron, the Dadaist poet, watches John sand surf. After a game of croquet, Nancy and Steve wander off for a splash in nearby hot springs.

40

By sundown the next evening, the wooden sculpture is finished and lays stiff on the sand like an enormous wooden corpse. It's time for a cocktail party. The nomads exchange their desert gear for elegant cocktail dresses and formal evening wear. Beside the supine wooden figure, a man in a white tuxedo chats idly with a woman in

taffeta and pearls. Then the call goes out, everyone grabs onto a long rope connected to a rotating jib and pulls. Slowly, as the last purple and orange rays of light fade from the desert sky, the wooden man rises to his feet. He towers more than four stories high. Moments later, Dave Warren, a fire-eater, blows an enormous torch of flame from his mouth, igniting the sculpture. Against the starry night, The Burning Man soars to life. "His groin burns blue as flames ascend his spine. His arms outstretched, reach upward and the fire, flaring red about his heart."

Meet the SF Cacophony Society, a randomly gathered network of free spirits. They are united in the pursuit of experiences beyond what they see as the pale of mainstream society. They are the Merry Pranksters of the 1990s. They travel through the social landscape, dispensing a variety of mind challenging activities to everyone. You may already be a member...

"Burning Man, Zone Trip #4" was an elaborate Cacophony Society event. "Event" is the catchword used to describe adventures, projects, and pranks. Events have included a canoe ride under the piers, a night of surrealistic theater as written by the audience, a Mad Hatter's Tea Party on the Embarcadero Freeway, a walking tour of Oakland's sewers, midnight picnics, the Atomic Café, a Golden Gate Bridge dinner party, and a midnight laundry bash. A Cacophony event is anything the mind can imagine and the body can execute. Anyone can join in. Anyone can give an event. Indeed, you may already be a member...

"You could say that a lot of the events are like the experiences you'd have while taking drugs, but without the drugs. The events themselves make people look at things differently," explains "M-Squared," a society member for the last two years. "A lot of us grew up in the 1960s and '70s. We were exposed to a barrage of alternative ideas. Now as we mature, we aren't going to settle for the norm."

There are few organized aspects to the group, but among them is the newsletter, *Rough Draft*. In its upcoming events are communicated to 250 or so member/subscribers. There's also a monthly meeting at the Common Grounds Coffee House on Hayes Street where ideas for events are formulated and organized. Planning an event can take weeks or months and includes everything from assessing the dangers to scouting out the perfect location and renting equipment. Once a new person starts showing up, it isn't long before the old hands start asking hopefully, "When are you going to give your event?" The only constraints on events are that they can't be commercial, nor may religious or political groups use events to propagate their views. "We give events to challenge the mental set of contemporary society," says M-Squared. "We break ordinary reality either for ourselves or other people. We challenge reality, stretch it, twist it."

### Enter the Unknown

*Tonight we will delve into a nether world of shaded grey where all is silence and death walks behind you!*

*You will need:*

- (1) All black or dark clothes with a comfortable fit.
- (2) Good shoes or boots that you don't mind getting dirty.
- (3) Flashlight.
- (4) Valid ID.

*Your host: Sebastian Melmoth—Rough Draft, December 1990*

About 25 people gather in the chilly night air at Lincoln and 7th, a favored place of convergence. Blindfolded, they are driven to a predestinated location. Then, hand-in-hand, they are led down a hill, through mud and along a gravel path.

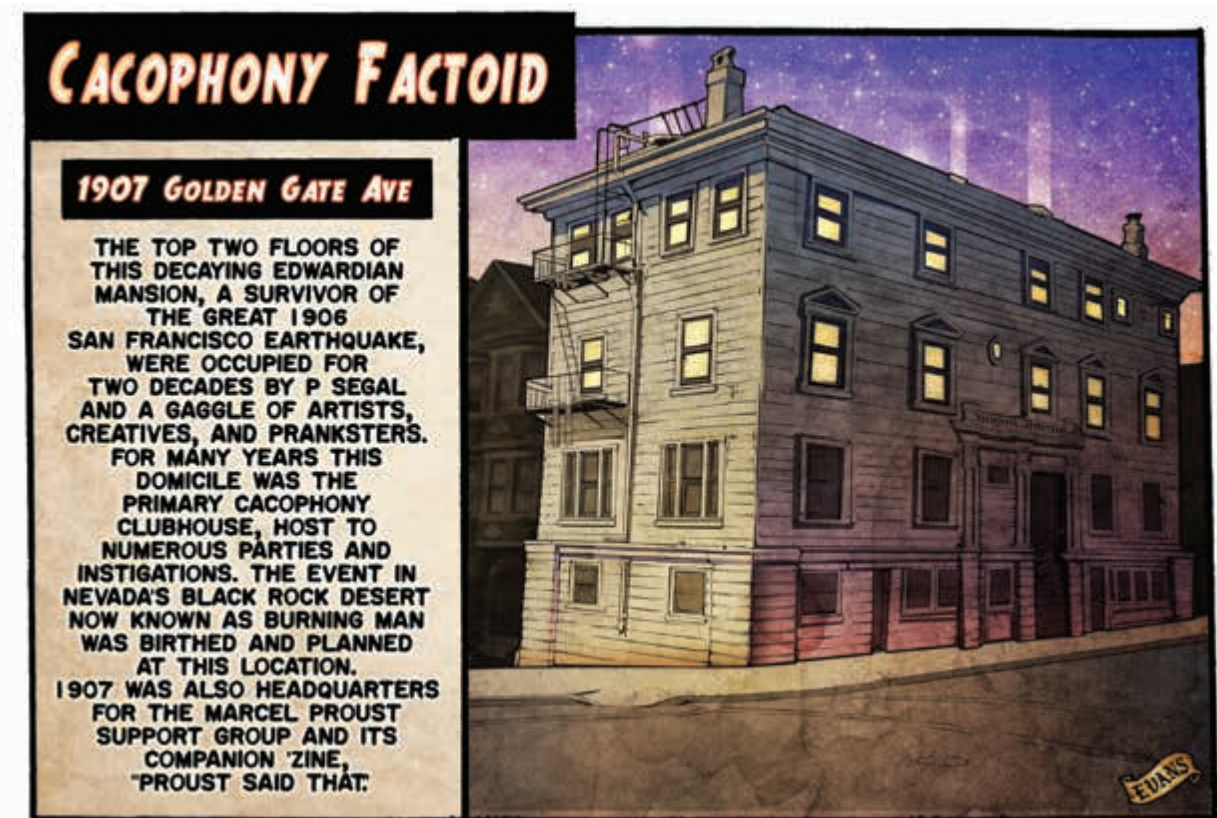
Finally they are allowed to halt. "Okay, you can take off your blindfolds now," invites tonight's host. The participants find themselves in a dimly illuminated, wooded area (which turns out to be Golden Gate Park (near the windmills). Sebastian Melmoth (not his real name) hands out tarot cards, and whoever picks the card Death is "it."

"I hope I get the death card," someone whispers.

"Whew," someone else sighs, "I'm just a zombie."

Melmoth calls out, "Let the game begin!"

Within the boundaries of the playing field, the "zombies" shuffle around trees and paths, merging into the shadows or, for the more adventurous, stalking Death. Once again, there are few rules: no running or talking. Should Death manage to sneak up and squeeze your shoulder, you die. The victim must let death escape by first counting to 30 before emitting a blood curdling scream and falling to the ground. The dead stay where they fall, silent until the game is over. In order to kill Death two zombies must point him out at the same time.



41



"We live in the kind of society where you pay other people to entertain you," says Melmoth later. "You pay to go to a movie someone else made, or pay to go to a play, or pay to see performance art. That's all great, but it's not something that you're doing. You're sitting there watching images and ideas that someone else went through enormous amounts of anguish and grief and creativity to create. It's their thing that you're experiencing. In an event, initially it may be the idea of two or three people, but the best ones are those that everybody gets into, interacts and are doing... physically doing themselves. Events are an incredible experience."

Melmoth breaks events into several categories: infiltrations (like joining the Moonies); street theater; games in weird places and costume; and exploring bizarre environments. "I wouldn't want to do anything else. It's a great way to socialize. It's a way of getting people together that isn't based on money, commerce, or the desire to have sex or whatever else normally gets people together."

42 The Cacophony Society's roots go back to a stormy night in January of 1977. Four friends went to Fort Point underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, to the place where in heavy weather the ocean's waves would hit a concrete pad below in the surf, splash up 30 feet in the air, and

then crash down on top of anyone standing there. The four clung tenaciously to the ruined iron railing that once secured the area while the waves threatened to drag them into the treacherous surf and certain doom. Later that night, huddled around a fire with hot drinks, they formed the Suicide Club. Its members were asked to "put their worldly affairs in order and live each day as though it was their last." The Suicide Club was a totally exclusive, infamously secretive, underground club that bathed in rumors of illegal and dangerous doings.

Melmoth along with 40 others went on the first mass Suicide Club initiation. "We were blindfolded and taken to an undisclosed place (Fort Funston), led over a narrow beam (in a parking lot!)" then taken underground, given one match and told to find our way out. After three hours of total darkness, groping along, I saw this tiny light. I'm walking toward it with this person... holding her hand but I didn't know who she was... had never seen her... and we're walking towards this tiny light. Then this figure with a shroud blowing in the wind stepped into the middle of the light, it's getting bigger and bigger as we get closer and closer. Then the figure walks away. And we're outside. It was a pretty mind boggling experience. I decided at that point that that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to start doing events right away."

Clockwise from top left: Lance Alexander and Jason Rackerby loitering in Oakland storm drains. Chris Radcliff and Jane Elliott appropriately costumed for a Cacophony Halloween party at 1907 Golden Gate. Erik Chipchase and Marianne O'Keefe attending the Annual Dinner on the Golden Gate Bridge. Peter Doty giving a blessing to the bomb during the third Atomic Café. Group shot of Zone Trip II attendees in Santa Monica.

The Suicide Club was composed of college-age, college-educated, pre-career people, says Melmoth; people a little too old to be hanging out in the Haight and a little too young to be in business. Drugs were forbidden on events-in part because the event was supposed to produce "the trip" and in part to avoid hassles with police. "The group was just adventurous, took a lot of risks. For the first three years, it was great being a secret society. We could get by with doing a lot of things because no one knew about us. But it was very insulated and that's what killed it," he continues. "As the years went on we became too ingrown."

"Cacophony is a lot more open, especially to the world at large. People know who we are and what we're doing. We communicate and get together with other groups to do events. That's something the Suicide Club never did. Cacophony interconnects and intertwines with a bunch of smaller groups, serving as an umbrella to make things happen. By not being as secretive and paranoid as the Suicide Club was, we don't have as much to fear. We've been able to integrate with a real mix of people who we wouldn't be exposed to otherwise. And that's great because out of ten people, maybe one has an instantaneous mindmeld with the group. They go, 'hey, this is great. This is what I want to do.' Then give events and open our minds up to new things."

Clockwise from top left: A spine of neon stretches across Trego Hot Springs at Desert Site Works, Nevada. Ed Holmes brings the St. Stupid Parade to a Zone Trip in Nevada's Black Rock Desert. "The Man" burns, Zone Trip #4: Bad Day at Black Rock. Steve Mobia and Dave Warren share a waggish moment at Zone Trip #4.

#### Gothic Nouveau Winter's Ball

The notes of airy waltzes, steamy sambas, and pounding trash rock filter across the waters of a dark lake to call those who would and will to dance. Don your (warmest) finery, bring a snack to share, and a chair to the rotunda at the Palace of Fine Arts. Some dances will be taught so that all may engage in dancing regardless of the number of left feet. The music's taped, the dress creative and the mood festive.

Info: Yahoo! Doorstop  
From Rough Draft: December 1990

"From a social standpoint, Cacophony provides friends," says M-Squared, as he takes a breather from dancing. Under the lit dome, four circles of dancers, some in baroque ball gowns and pantaloons, skip and sashay as if Louis XIV were holding court. "It's a society, a kinship. In general, those in Cacophony are more open and sincere, that is, accepting and less judgmental. There's an atmosphere of trust. We don't judge on lifestyle, money, or looks. It's the individual character and imagination that matters. You can be a real misfit or oddball and you'll be accepted."

"There are some people who are really unusual and seem gifted in some way," agrees Louise Jarmilowicz, an artist. She is the current editor of *Rough Draft* and specializes

## “It’s the individual character and imagination that matters. You can be a real misfit or oddball and you’ll be accepted.”

in such events as the Haute Trash Fashion Show and Midnight Laundry. “Through the group they can express that. They blossom. It may not be noticeable right away. That’s kind of fun. Every time someone comes in, they have their own imagination and ideas that no one else has ever thought about. It’s very exciting because there’s always an unknown factor.”

“Beyond that, if you’re shy like I am,” adds M-Squared, “Cacophony helps us challenge ourselves to participate.”

### Bar-B-Que on the Edge

Meet: Bouncers Bar, 64 Townsend St.

*In the spirit of previous Midnight Picnics, we will gather for a late night meal in a picturesque, industrial setting. This particular spot is located on the water (swimming is not suggested), where wild plants meet abandoned machinery. Bring food and drink, something to barbecue, and suitably appropriate tales to read or tell. Wear dark clothes.*

—Rough Draft, May 1990

“I’ve always looked at this city as an urban environment, an urban playground,” says Melmoth. “You look at places that people don’t even think about, that are completely negative places in the daily life of commerce living. Those are the places that I look for: underground, behind buildings, on top of buildings, in abandoned buildings, in between freeways, under freeways. Places that you don’t even know exist. I think about what event I could give there.

“We were at an abandoned pier for a Midnight Bar-B-Que, you had to sneak out on to it, walk on this little trail along a fence then climb over a railing and go out on this rotting pier. About 150 yards away under the freeway overpass there was this encampment of six or eight guys, most of them Vietnam Vets, and I’m 95 percent sure, really heavily cranked up on speed. Speed freaks. They had all the markings. Really dangerous people. And we were doing an event with 20 or 30 people on the pier!

44 “I knew that they might be a problem beforehand, so I just walked over and talked to them. I said, ‘Hey, we’re going to have 20 or so people walk through here around midnight, having a bar-b-que. How about it? Why don’t you come over later for a beer?’ They left us alone.

Probably because they thought we were weirder than they were,” “It’s not for everybody.”

### The BART Lounge

*Hey there, you truly fabulous people! BART is going to Vegas! This will be a truly incredible evening of entertainment, when the evening commute BART train is transformed into a Las Vegas-styled lounge. We are looking for three sorts of people to join in:*

1. *If you have an act (comedy/magic/showgirl-routine, or any other entertainment), be prepared to perform.*
2. *If you want to be part of the atmosphere, come decked out in your best Vegas wear (lowa house-wife, lounge lizard, eloping couple, cowboy, etc.).*
3. *If you want to dress “straight,” we do need plants to blend in with commuters. Remember, you in the audience are the ones we truly, truly love the most!*

*Cost: 85 cents if you get on & off at different but adjoining BART stations (ex: on at Powell, then go to Glen Park, off at Montgomery).*

*Info: Dwayne & Dusty.*

—Rough Draft, January 1991

Chris couldn’t believe it. On his commute home from San Francisco to Concord, there was this woman in a bushy brown wig and slinky, pink lounge gown singing into a microphone with her partner, a tall blond-haired man in a white and gold tuxedo, while parading up and down the aisle of the BART car. A cigarette girl, more of a woman really, sauntered behind, two rats crawling across her wooden tray of goodies. Another man handed out a questionnaire: What kinds of acts would you like to see on the BART Lounge? Should we designate any BART cars as non-entertainment? Are you interested in becoming a BART Lounge entertainer? Suddenly, the cigarette girl was on Chris’s lap. “Those your rats?” he asked. She chuckled, “Naah, I just found them in the trash. Chocolate?”

Weirdness feeds on itself, goes the saying, and Cacophony upholds the theory. Everyone encourages, even competes, to be slightly more outrageous. “Have you ever been to Britain?” asks Alexander, *Rough Draft’s* first editor and producer of Ritual Lying, Midnight Picnics, and an

Absinthe Literary Party. “Eccentrics, who are basically people with an idiosyncratic vision, are tolerated, even cultivated there. The U.S. is shifting towards a more centralized concept, everybody is thinking the same thing. I think there’s still room for people to be eccentric, for individualism. But less than there used to be. Maybe Cacophony provides that, a place where people who have their own strange vision can be together.”

Alternative views, eccentrics, creative, accepting—of course, The City is the natural place for a group with such adjectives as these. “San Francisco has always been a boomtown, a place to go to make your dreams and indulge in your grandiose impulses,” says Larry Harvey, artistic creator of The Burning Man. He joined forces with the Cacophony Society to stage “Zone Trip #4” in the desert. “The City is a place where people are tolerated-

## “Maybe Cacophony provides that: A place where people who have their own strange vision can be together.”

Sometimes their strangeness attracts the REALLY strange, even too strange for Cacophony. “We tend to draw weirdos and kooks,” says M-Squared with a laugh. “And the authorities,” he laughs again. “But as long as people aren’t violent or too disruptive, we try to remember that we’re all equal. The main thing is that people are interested in getting together and experiencing events.”

In these serious times, the question often asked is: wouldn’t all that time and energy be better directed into the pursuit of something of significance? Alexander replies, “Cacophony is a place to be amateurish. There’s a real drive, even among the whimsical, to be very professional. And that can be intimidating. In Cacophony there’s definitely a playfulness.”

in the old days because you had to, if you didn’t your neighbor might shoot you. It’s more of a small town than big city. Small enough to create a community, which also creates tolerance. You can come here and be whatever you imagine yourself. There’s so much diversity that co-exists here. Cacophony represents that—a society of free spirits. Where else would they exist? Cacophony is made by the same instincts that started the Beatniks and Hippies.

M-Squared concurs, “All the weirdos have come West.”



Above: Sunset at the Hollywood Letters during the Cacophony Society Zone Trip II.



**CHEAP SUIT SANTAS (1994)**

Reprinted from Twisted Times #16  
Written by Klaus Maginrannus

My name is Santa Claus and I'm an alcoholic.



I need a drink real bad, and I'm hornier than a whole herd of reindeer. Keep your kids away from me. Keep your dog away from me. Me and my friends (30 other loser Santas) just graduated from the Kris Kringle Institute, and now we're gonna paint the town red. And white. And shove jingle bells up its ass! Merry fucking Christmas!

Anyone can be a Santa. All it takes is a red suit and a white beard and strangers will treat you like a rich uncle even when you're stinking drunk and fondling their kids and saying things like "ever seen the north pole, sweetheart?" Oriental Trading Co. sells the full getup for \$25, made in China out of 100% manmade materials by genuine political prisoners. One size fits all, and no, that ain't no candy cane in my pocket!

46

Ever notice how Santas got a lot of aliases? Kris Kringle, Father Christmas, Saint Nick...if anyone else had that many aka's, what would you think? Would you let your kid sit in his lap? Ever notice how if you just move one

letter around, you can make "Santa" spell "Satan"? Ever seen St. Nick and Old Nick in the same place? Think about it.

We started our run at the Emporium department store. They've got a little kiddie playland on the roof, so we rode the escalators up three flights and packed the ferris wheel with Santas. Ho ho ho. Then we went to Union Square and had a Santa lynching. One of the Santas had been extra naughty, so we strung him up. Die, Santa! Then we packed a cable car with Santas and rode up Nob Hill, mooning the tourists.

Fat Santas, skinny Santas, punk Santas, hooker Santas. Aggressive panhandling Santas. "Give Santa a quarter, you cheap son of a bitch!" A gang of Santas kicking the shit out of a Santa who passed out



in the street. Lip-locked Santas with their hands down each others' pants. One Santa staggering out into traffic, drinking from a Pine Sol bottle. The cars honking! The people cheering! Look, mommy, it's Santa Claus! Let's take a picture!

One family of tourists just couldn't get enough Santa pictures. Dad took a bunch, then got in the picture with all

the Santas while Mom took one. Won't they be surprised when the pictures come back and Dad's got a bleach-blonde hooker Santa squatting in front of his crotch like she's giving him head? Look, honey: Santa's not wearing any underwear!

Santa went in the Fairmont Hotel and crashed a society dinner-dance. Thirty Santas rocking the dance floor and drinking people's drinks. The geezers thought it was part of the entertainment, but hotel security wasn't very happy. So Santa went to the Tonga Room, and the lounge combo on the little island in the middle of the pool played "Here Comes Santa Claus" while the goon squad gave Santa the heave-ho.

So Santa went to North Beach, where all the hip kids hang out, and took over a bar called Vesuvio. The kids were so hip they pretended not to notice Santa until he started passing joints around and doing carrier landings on the bar. Go, Santa, go! Chug-a-lug!

Next, Santa went to a strip club called the Lusty Lady. All the little booths were packed full of Santas slipping quarters in the little slots. One of the dancers, a redhead, started tugging her nipple rings and making wishes. "Hey Santa, I want a Hawaiian vacation. I been good, honest!" Well, Santa checked his list and guess what? She was naughty, so she got nothing. Ho ho ho! Better luck next year, you whore!

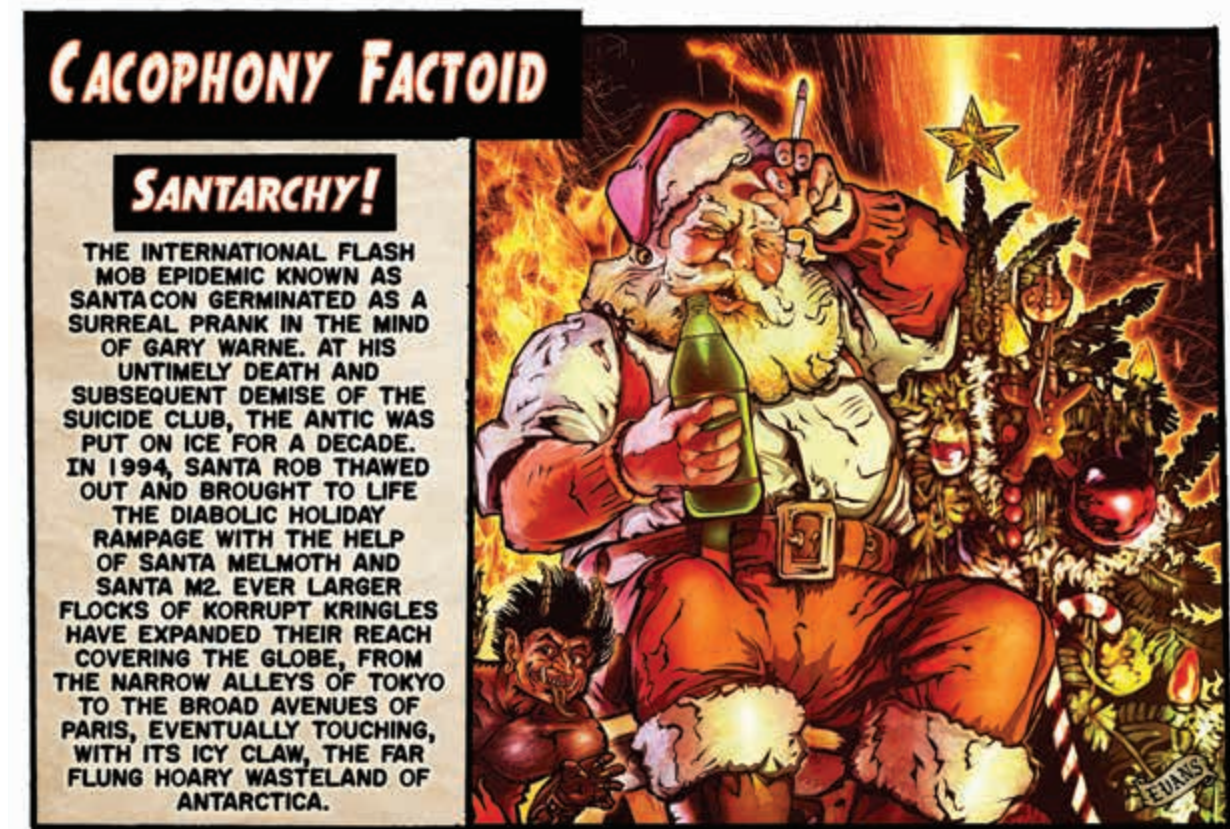
Santa was pretty wasted by this time, and pretty damned happy he'd hijacked that schoolbus from the Kris Kringle Institute. Santas screaming out the windows, throwing snowballs at the cars...okay, so it was really ice, not snow...ho, ho, ho!

Santa went South of Market and took over a club called the Paradise Lounge. Santa packed the mosh pit and danced hard, thrashing and sweating. A couple of Santas ripped their suits, and the Santa on crutches got his crutches knocked out from under him. Boom! See Santa go down. See Santa stage-dive! Santa passed out condoms and cigarettes at the bar, and tried to convince the naughtier kids that he could see them when they were sleeping.

The last thing Santa remembers is getting thrown out of Slim's and going to the 20 Tank. Santa stole a pack of cigarettes some yuppie hole left on the bar, and then denied it to her face. Ho ho ho. Be nice to Santa or you'll get a lump of coal in your eye!

Next year, Santa's going barhopping again. Maybe he'll let you buy him a drink, or maybe he'll sell you some crack. Ho ho ho. But you better not cry. Oh no. And you better not shout if you know what's good for you. Santa knows how to deal with whiney little snitches.

Merry Christmas, everyone!



47

Above: Santa Squid, Santa Kevin, and Santa Pyrokitten spreading Xmas cheer at the 3rd SantaCon in Portland, 1996.





**AN ARMY OF SANTAS CAN'T BE BEAT**

San Francisco SantaCon (#2), December 1995  
S. Cape Claus, reporting:

Shortly before Christmas, I saw in a weekend newspaper an alarming photo of a department store Santa Claus in Tucson under police protection. Santas in Arizona have reportedly received death threats in the mail.

Clearly these are hard times for all-but if St. Nick, the patron saint of this holiday season, is on the run, where does that leave us?

Being an empathetic, sensitive kind of guy, I thought I'd check out what it's like to wear the red suit and white beard, and surround myself with Christmas zealots. Surrendering to this impish impulse, I bought a Santa suit Saturday morning after breakfast.

My housemate jeered, saying I'd never find Santa drag in the predominantly Latino Mission District where we live, but within one block it was eureka in the Woolworth's. The cashier was so friendly on espying my purchase, she gave a 20% discount, making me a Santa for less than 20 bucks—such a deal.

Boarding BART, I was taken aback to see three other Santas going downtown. "Merry fucking Christmas," one spat.

Perhaps it's best for Santas to avoid one another—reminding me of another recent news story of two Santas in France who came to blows in a territorial dispute over a street corner.

Once down at the Embarcadero, I saw what can only be described as a mob of maybe a hundred Santas rallying behind the skating rink. I thought, it may be a long way to the North Pole, but these are my kith and kin. One handed me a card for the "Kris Kringle Institute— the Santa Specialists." I knew then that I'd arrived.

It was a meeting of Santa and Anti Claus, in all their myriad guises. Guys and gals were decked out in red duds with preposterous white wigs and beards, offset by absurd flourishes: dark glasses, candy cane leggings, dominatrix paraphernalia, with plenty of attitude to spare.

ONLY SANTA CAN SET YOU FREE, read a sign carried by Santa posing as a caped crusader.

AN ARMY OF SANTAS CAN'T BE BEAT, said another.

A map was distributed showing the route for the night's ramble (rumble?) about town. The Santa who prepared the route signed himself? "Claus von Bulow." Hmm.



Above: Santas leaving the United Nations in NYC, after staging a "UN out of the North Pole" rally at SantaCon Five, 1998.



To the extent that this Santanalia was organized, the San Francisco Cacophony Society rounded up its usual suspects from across the art-mutant spectrum. Badasses involved included guerrilla artists from Survival Research Laboratories (known for their gladiatorial robot shows), Burning Man, and other Bay Area anarcho-nihilistic prankster groups. This was a chance to "take it to the streets" and generally Fuck Shit Up.

After a brief reading of their art riot act, the Santas hoisted white garbage sacks of toys, pulled on their

hipflasks, fired up smokes, and plunged into the holiday crowd of shoppers counting down the days to Xmas.

"Are you guys on strike?" asked one concerned parent.

"Lady, we are going to paint this town red," replied a Santa with horns sprouting through his merry red cap.

Another one added, by way of example, this oft-heard benediction: "Ho. Ho ho. Ho ho ho. Ho!" This minimal incantation was not without menace, a subversion of the Holiday Paradigm?

Santas kept busy checking a constantly changing, goggling crowd for signs of Who's Naughty and Who's Nice. Most were naughty, naturally.

And paint it we did, with flowing spirits, celebratory cigars (purchased at the Fairmont), and lusty, ribald remarks (for male or female, Santa's lap does itch). Our bonhomie was for the most part infectious in the bars and restaurants that we cycloned through.

We stormed the Hyatt Regency, panted up to the Mark Hopkins, the Drake, and the St. Francis. Security in these



Above: NYC and SF Santas mob Michael Moore at the Plaza Hotel. If two hundred Santas were to have a celebrity sighting in Manhattan, would it be Robert DeNiro? Woody Allen? Not likely...  
Below: The Santas got a bad rap sometimes for being rude to citizens or perhaps scary to children. This photo shows the much more typical activities Santa engaged in when encountering families and babies on the route back to the North Pole.



SNoB Hill hotels were not generally pleased to hear we were “with the Kringle Institute party,” searching their registers in vain.

Down the hill, they received us—“ho ho”—with startling aplomb at Planet Hollywood—probably thinking we were just another special effect ordered up by a hypersteroidal Terminator celebrant.

The mood at Emporium was a frenetic lockstep: panic shoppers. Santas chanted, hoping to grease the wheels of consumer industry, “CHARGE IT, CHARGE IT,” while the disbelieving customers wondered if this was how Santa could set them free.

A vindictive security guard later accused two Santas of molesting this department store’s Christmas ornaments and had them arrested.

On Market St. at Powell, the Santas paused to kick hell out of one of their own—whether he was a scab or “trying to go

Top left: Santa Chuck Palahniuk taking notes at the 3rd SantaCon in Portland, OR, 1996. Various control Santas, Santa Melmoth in particular, were extremely paranoid during the event due to three (largely unwarranted) arrests the previous year and rumors of police wiretaps during the current year. Melmoth, not recognizing the very inquisitive, note-taking, pre-Fight Club journalist/diesel mechanic asked to see Palahniuk’s driver’s license in a lame attempt to determine whether or not the intense Santa was an undercover cop.  
Below: “That way!” Santa takes the Upper East Side by storm.



union” was never clear. After some fussing with a noose (and, one assumes, a safety harness) he was hung from a stoplight post by the neck until he soon cheered up.

This Santa was obviously made of strong stuff, or had lives to spare, for he quickly regained his wits on being cut down, before the police arrived. In the ensuing imbroglio, a female Santa was cited after flashing her breasts at the cops.

By this point, 50 diehard Santas escaped on the Geary bus, but were stopped by several police cruisers, who required each Santa to exit the bus with beard lowered and eyes seared by squinting flashlights so they could identify and arrest the Santa 2 who had offended Emporium.

There was brief pandemonium as some jettisoned their costumes, while others emptied their swag under the seats. One of the gifts a few Santas had to relinquish were clear plastic bags containing white rocks, a spoon, a book of matches, and a toy syringe. The label identified this as “Santa’s Heroin-Cooker Kit.”

When it became clear we could not save our Santaneros now in handcuffs, we continued to the Palace of Legion of Honor to crash the Christmas party of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

One free-lance Santa was surprised to encounter his editor (from a rival newspaper) lounging with a plastic

cup of fruit juice by a Rodin sculpture. Even with a beard (thrust aside by drink), the editor easily recognized him, remarking acidly, “I never saw such a sorry lot of Santas, in all my life.”

“Well even Santa has bad hair days,” his Santa-scribe replied.

A few minutes later, despite furious shmoozing, the Santas were asked to leave, perhaps out of respect for the finger food, which they had seized with ravenous glee.

Outside it was wet and cold. The Santas glumly considered the plight of the two who’d been jailed out of an excess of puritan zeal.

Eventually the “strong arm robbery” charges were reduced on the Santa 2 to misdemeanors: “obstructing a business operator” and public drunkenness. Punitively, these Santas were kept in the klink for two days before being released on bail. One is planning a counter-suit for mistaken identity.

With Salvation Army bell-ringers now banned from some department store doorways, it should come as no surprise that unauthorized, irregular Santas are everywhere on the run, subject to arrest and intimidation by the Scrooge-minions of law and order.

As we lurch into the late ‘90s, it’s no more Mr. Nice Guys.



Above: S. Cape Claus, sporting the season’s stylish eyewear.

SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT

INCIDENT REPORT STATEMENT

1713380

LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE OF PERSON GIVING STATEMENT

DOB / AGE

RESIDENCE PHONE (DAY / NIGHT)

REPORT IS FOR (DAY / NIGHT)

443-4533

PD

RESIDENCE ADDRESS / CITY IF NOT SAN FRANCISCO

ZIP CODE

BUSINESS ADDRESS / CITY IF NOT SAN FRANCISCO

ZIP CODE

SFPD Co A 766 Vallejo St

94133

DATE OF STATEMENT

TIME STARTED

TIME COMPLETED

LOCATION WHERE STATEMENT TAKEN

Dec/16/1995

10:00 pm

11 PM

AT SCENE  OTHER: Co A

STATEMENT TAKEN BY (NAME / STAR)

IN PRESENCE OF

S. NG #1055

I RESPONDED TO A CALL OF DRUNKEN SANTAS THAT VANDALIZED AND STOLE FROM THE EMPORIUM STORE ON MARKET STREET. I LOCATED SOME OF THE SUSPECT SANTAS.

NUMEROUS SOUTHERN, TENDERLOIN AND CENTRAL POLICE UNITS CONVERGED ON THE CORNER OF GEARY/POWELL TO MONITOR A CROWD OF ABOUT FIFTY NAUGHTY SANTAS. THESE SANTAS HAD REEKED HAVOC IN THE EMPORIUM AND THEN MARCHED UP TO GEARY AND POWELL. THE SANTAS WERE WAITING FOR THE 38 MUNI BUS. PER THE ORDERS OF LT. PARA, 1J203, THE POLICE WERE WAITING FOR WITNESSES FROM THE EMPORIUM THAT COULD IDENTIFY THE PERPATRATORS. I WAS MONITORING THIS SITUATION ON MY RADIO AS I CLOSED ON GEARY AND POWELL.

I WAS ON POWELL STREET AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE ST FRANCIS HOTEL (WHICH WAS ADJACENT TO THE NAUGHTY SANTAS) WHEN I SPOTTED A FEW SANTAS IN THE HOTEL LOBBY THAT WERE ACTING VERY SUSPICIOUS. THESE SANTAS APPEARED TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE AND CONCERNED, THEIR EYES WERE DARTING AROUND THE LOBBY. THESE SANTAS MOVED TO THE SIDE OF THE LOBBY; SOMEWHAT OUT OF VIEW FROM THE MAIN LOBBY. THESE ACTIONS APPEARED TO BE THE ACTIONS OF SUSPECT SANTAS THAT WERE HIDING FROM THE POLICE. I MONITORED THESE SANTAS.

THE FIFTY SANTAS BOARDED THEIR BUS AND LEFT THE CORNER. SOME TIME PASSED. THE WITNESSES ARRIVED. THE SANTAS THAT WERE HIDING IN THE HOTEL CAME OUT ONTO POWELL STREET. THESE SANTAS STILL DIDN'T NOTICE ME. THESE SANTAS CAUTIOUSLY MOVED TOWARDS GEARY STREET. THEIR ACTIONS SHOWED CONCERN ABOUT THE POLICE SEARCH FOR SUSPECT SANTAS. THE SANTAS SAW MANY POLICE STILL ON GEARY STREET SO THEY TURNED AROUND ABRUPTLY AND HEADED BACK TOWARDS THE HOTEL AND AWAY FROM THE POLICE. THESE SANTAS HID IN THE DOORWAY OF THE FILA STORE AND THEN QUICKLY BOARDED A TAXI. I STOPPED THE TAXI. I EXPLAINED THE SITUATION TO THE THREE SUSPICIOUS SANTAS. I ORDERED THEM OUT OF THE TAXI AND TO SUBMIT TO A LEGAL POLICE DETENTION. THEY REFUSED IN AN UN-CHRISTMAS LIKE FASHION. THESE SANTAS ORDERED THE TAXI DRIVER TO LEAVE. I, ONCE AGAIN, ORDERED THE SANTAS OUT OF THE TAXI AND TO SUBMIT TO A DETENTION. THEY REFUSED. I TOLD THE TAXI DRIVER TO BRING HIS VEHICLE WITH THE SANTAS AROUND THE CORNER TO LT. PARA'S LOCATION. THE WITNESSES POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED TWO OF THE THREE SANTAS IN THE TAXI. OFFICER RAMSEY OF SOUTHERN STATION TOOK CUSTODY OF THE SUSPECT SANTAS.

I DECLARE, UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY, THIS STATEMENT OF \_\_\_\_\_ PAGES IS TRUE AND CORRECT, BASED ON MY PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE.

SIGNATURE OF PERSON GIVING STATEMENT

### Santas Crash Children's Party

By David Tuller  
Chronicle Staff Writer

'Tis the season to be jolly, but the police weren't laughing after they arrested three pranksters in Santa suits who crashed a children's carnival Saturday evening.

The three were among one hundred Santas from the San Francisco Cacophony Society, an organization of practical jokesters, who crashed an annual children's party on the roof of the downtown Emporium department store. Before arriving at the Emporium, the Santas wandered through the Fairmont and Mark Hopkins hotels and Planet Hollywood.

According to police, security guards at the department store responded to complaints that members of the group had disrupted the party. The guards said they saw one woman open her Santa suit, revealing her breasts and laughing as parents covered their children's eyes.

As security herded the Santas out of the store, the guards apparently noticed that one or two pranksters had snatched a wreath belonging to the store. The guards tussled with them and repossessed the wreath, after which the group left the store and boarded a 38 Geary bus in Union Square.

Sebastian Melmoth, a member of the group, said police met the Santas when they disembarked at 33rd Avenue.

### Brigade of bogus Santas wreaks havoc at S.F. stores

By Richard Halstead  
Independent Journal reporter.

SAN FRANCISCO — Kids shipping with their parents at Union Square over the weekend saw Santa doing a heck of lot more than just kissing mommy.

Some 50 men and women dressed as Santa Claus rampaged through Union Square department stores Saturday night.

The Santas' naughty not nice behavior allegedly included drinking beer, smoking marijuana and exposing themselves to children.

Police arrested three Kris Kringle imposters, including a 45-year-old San Rafael woman.

According to a San Francisco police report, the worst havoc was wreaked at the Emporium, where the ersatz Santas disrupted an annual children's carnival on the store's roof about 8:30 p.m.

Emporium security guards said the crimson-attired group was drinking beer and smoking marijuana when one of the female Santas opened her Santa suit to reveal her breasts. She reportedly laughed loudly as parents shielded their children's eyes.

The guards then tried to escort the wild herd of Santas out of the store, but one of the Jolly Saint Nicks was spotted nipping one of the store's decorative wreaths.

A struggle ensued between this Santa and a guard, with the guard finally yanking the wreath away from him.

Another Mr. Claus snatched a store rope strung between two metal poles and began lowering the rope over the heads of other Santas as they descended on an escalator.

When asked to return the rope, this Santa, with a twist of his merry head, was heard to reply: "There's 60 of us — how many are there of you?"

The Santa brigade finally exited the store while using a bullhorn to call out: "Emporium hates Santa." They proceeded to block traffic and climb lampposts on Market Street.

One of the men, who were later arrested on suspicion of taking Christmas decorations from the Emporium, told police the incident was arranged by the Practical Jokers Club, an offshoot of a local humor club called the Cacophony Society.

Earlier in the evening the same group frolicked through Nordstrom and Macy's without attracting the attention of police.

Police arrested 35, of Belmont and San Francisco for attempted robbery. 45, of San Rafael was cited for indecent exposure.

Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

FOR OVER-ALL CLEANING: This suit is made of high quality fabric and should only be cleaned by a professional cleaner. DO NOT use any heavy duty detergent.

Call #1561 (01/28)

Santa? December 14th, near 24 hour Church of Elvis, you were the one with the red suit roaming the streets. Meet for milk and cookies? Booze?

Call #1384 (01/21)

### Arrests follow downtown pranks

San Francisco police arrested two men and cited several others when a group of pranksters...



You Better Watch Out!  
the Hordes of

**Kris Kringle Institute**  
SAN FRANCISCO, USA  
The Santa Specialist

**NIGHT CRAWLER**

SF WEEKLY, Wednesday, Dec 20 1995  
 Silke Tudor

"How do you miss a gang of a hundred marauding Santas?" my photographer asks incredulously as we circle Union Square on his motorcycle. We've received an anonymous tip about the second annual Santa Claus rampage -- the deranged vision of a fringe-anarchist with links to the Cacophony Society and Survival Research Laboratories (SRL) -- but all the traffic has made us late. Although several St. Nick look-alikes carouse the brightly lit skating rink, they seem too normal, not the seedy gents we expect. Suddenly, three men in matching red suits with dirty bundles slung over their shoulders cross the intersection in front of us. That must be them, I think.

As nearly 100 Santas gather in front of Dewey's Bar, the anticipation of orchestrated chaos (not to mention the desecration of hallowed Christmas icons) makes my skin tingle. The Kris Kringles are pulling bottles of booze wrapped in brown paper sacks out of their suits, cigars burning lazily from between clenched teeth. A spunky dominatrix-Santa in striped tights whips a friend on all fours with a leather belt, while a manic clown-Santa plays a psychotic tune on an accordion. Stepping onto the sidewalk, I am immediately enveloped in a sea of red hats, furry tummies, and smiling vulgarities ("You're

a naughty one, aren't you?"), until a leader-Santa with a large orange traffic cone commands our attention.

"To the square!" he orders, shouting through the cone. The Santas move in a whooping, hollering mass across the middle of the street, spreading good cheer with a "Ho! Ho! Fucking Ho!" A nicely dressed middle-aged woman is accosted as her husband stands by impotently. "Have you been naughty?" asks a lecher-Santa with a bawdy wink. "I think you have," he laughs, slinging his arm around her waist. "We got a naughty one here!" he teases as his comrades turn and cheer. With a nervous smile the victim delicately extricates herself from the grope. "You don't know what you're missing -- nothing like partying with reindeer," he yells.

Under the twinkling lights of the Union Square Christmas tree, the Santas erupt into a chorus of off-color carols, completely upstaging a more traditional choir of do-gooders. A drunken Santa stumbles and falls to the ground in front of a large group of camera-toters.

"Santa down!" alerts a sunglasses-wearing biker-Santa. Several jolly St. Nicks surround the fallen soldier, kicking him in the stomach and yelling obscenities.



The other Clauses hospitably offer me slugs from their hooch, but they're stingy on information. "We are sworn to secrecy," one mom-Santa offers. Then I spot a pair of familiar cheeks, and with a quick tug of his beard discover they belong to a longtime friend. "To Macy's!" the leader-Santa commands, and we lose each other in the crush. Later, I find him stealing a stranger's latte.

"This is the Cacophony Society, SRL, the Burning Man, everybody," he informs me excitedly. "This is the heart of San Francisco's underground art scene. We're all together, and no one will fuck with us tonight!" Meanwhile, the Santas carouse through the first floor of Macy's, chanting, "Charge it!" while startled shoppers clutch their packages to their chests. When security rushes in, it's off to Planet Hollywood.

The Santas bum rush the line, and weave through the tables boogieing to the piped-in movie music while waiters look on in disbelief. But the patrons are tickled by what they think is a special holiday treat from Schwarzenegger and friends, until several gourmet-Santas start sampling their food.

Later, on the Emporium rooftop, the motley crew whirls around on the kiddie rides, feasting on stolen cotton candy and warm malt liquor. "Which one's the real Santa?" asks a mischievous 7-year-old. "I am," says the most authentic-looking one of the bunch, handing the boy a present. Emporium security is unmoved by such warm fuzzies, though, and the Santas beat a hasty retreat.

Above: This very bad Santa was chased up Market Street in downtown San Francisco, kicked to the curb, beaten and strung up for a variety of reasons, depending on which Santa you asked.

The darkest moment occurs near the cable car turnaround, when a rebel-Santa is strung up by his neck from a traffic light. "He tried to go union," sneers a capitalist-Santa as the seemingly dead figure twitches in the breeze. A spokesman-Santa calms the startled crowd: "There's nothing to see here folks. Keep walking. Keep shopping. C'mon, you're not really trying." Someone breaks the tension with a distorted rendition of "Deck the Halls" on a "borrowed" sax.

Levity comes to an end when Emporium security with headsets and walkie-talkies storm the scene with two policemen in tow. "To the bus stop!" urges the leader-Santa. At the Powell and Geary stop for the 38 line, the Santas compose themselves like respectable citizens as a growing number of cops line up across the street. "Everybody just stay cool," someone whispers. "Just stick together. They can't arrest Santa."

Oh yeah? The officers hold one Santa for assaulting a security guard with a Christmas wreath and cite a female exhibitionist-Santa for indecent exposure. When the bus finally arrives, the rest of us are escorted on board free of charge by the SFPD. Of course, little do they know that the 38 is the planned transport to the Legion of Honor, where the Santas crash the Chronicle Christmas party and drink and eat for a good 15 minutes before being booted out.

"We had a lot of fun," comments a member of the Cacophony Society. "If you like, we'll send you some material on our next event." I'll have to get back to you on that one.



Above: The second SantaCon in San Francisco, 1995. Restaurant patrons at a packed Planet Hollywood cheered uproariously as Santas chanted 'Dinner and drinks are on Arnold!' at the top of their lungs, before being given the old heave-ho by the future governor's amused staff.

*"This serpentine slag-heap he was just about to ride into now, this ex-refinery is not a ruin at all. It is in perfect working order. Only waiting for the right connections to be set up, to be switched on... modified, precisely, deliberately by bombing that was never hostile, but part of a plan both sides – "sides?" – had always agreed on... Yes and now what if we – all right say we are supposed to be the kabbalists out here, say that's our real destiny, to be the scholar magicians of the Zone."*  
 – Gravity's Rainbow, Thomas Pynchon

**INTO THE ZONE**

Carrie Galbraith

I grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles, in Covina, actually. A place of endless street grids; of same-looking ranch houses punctuated with train tracks and car dealerships. We had a large mall; one of the first of its kind – enclosed. We would visit Clifton's Cafeteria and shop for school clothes at the May Company. I learned to drive in the parking lot (on Sundays, when the mall was closed) in a friend's three-speed Mustang, before I was actually old enough to take driver's training.

The mall had a theater and on the occasional Saturday, we were dropped off for the matinee. We'd sit through

the organists' recital and wait for the picture to appear on the big screen.

I had always known I was different. My idea of a good time was to read the World Book Encyclopedia, take photos with my Brownie Fiesta of what my cat was looking at out the window, or sneak out to the living room after everyone was asleep, and turn on the big black and white TV and tune in to the late-night movies.

Sometimes, on Friday nights, we would be allowed to get in our pajamas and then pile into our Country Squire and head to the local drive-in to listen to the tinny sounds of the latest movie from Disney or some other Hollywood studio.

On special occasions, we dressed up, drove into LA, had dinner in Chinatown, and then went over to Hollywood where we would see a film at Grauman's Chinese Theater or the Cinerama Dome on Sunset. It was to the Cinerama Dome, one summer when I was eleven, where my parents brought us to see a new movie, one that had just been released. I sat quietly in my seat and let the film envelop me, not understanding a single frame, but knowing this was something bigger than me, than my family, than my brain had ever encountered

The film was *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

And everything changed.

By the time I was seventeen, I had left American film behind to explore the black and white world of the European Cineaste. At nineteen, I discovered the cinematic wonders of the Soviet world and became familiar with Andrei Tarkovsky's limited body of work. I would seek his films out in obscure midnight viewings on college campuses. I remember one hours-long drive to a UC campus to see his *Ivan's Childhood*, as it had never had a west coast viewing.

Poetic Cinema, and the directors of the genre, became my *raison d'etre*. I gave up American and Western European film – taking Bergman's quote to heart: *"My discovery of Tarkovsky's first film was like a miracle. Suddenly, I found myself standing at the door of a room the keys of which had, until then, never been given to me. It was a room I had always wanted to enter and where he was moving freely and fully at ease."*

I felt encouraged and stimulated: someone was expressing what I had always wanted to say without knowing how.

Tarkovsky based *Stalker* on the novel *Roadside Picnic*, by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky. After discovering the film, I sought out the book and steeped myself in Zone lore.

At the same time I was devouring Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, a book as much or more about The Zone but with the added, surreal "Pynchonesque" American aspect, in contrast to the somber inflections of the Soviet perspective.

When I discovered Cacophony, I found like-minded people and I embraced the Cacophony concept, as I understood it: *that any idea can be brought to life and acted out. All events are valid, all alternate realities can be embraced and believed, all stretching of the boundaries between reality and imagination can be tested.*

I felt as if I could create worlds like the many I had seen on the big screen, and I could step into them and play with them and be part of them. I could create a believable reality out of a fictional concept, and interact with others inside of it.

And what better fictional reality to explore than The Zone? That strange place of constantly shifting boundaries: unknown, tricky and dangerous—yet rewarding, with unexpected difficulties and surprises. One had to learn how to navigate The Zone. One needed to become a Stalker to lead others through the terrain, riddled with the potential for calamity and misplaced or misunderstood dreams.

By the time the first Zone Trip came together, I had many events under my belt, as well as stints as Editor



Above: Jon "Mr. Science" Alexandr and Ethyl Ketone on top of the Million Dollar Movie building in downtown LA on Zone Trip I. Earlier, the crew, while sporting white jumpsuits, handed out pre-addressed and return postage stamped pataphysical postcard questionnaires to the citizens of Covina.

CACOPHONY FACTOID

ZONE TRIP ORIGINS

**INSPIRED BY THE ANDREI TARKOVSKY FILM "STALKER" BASED ON THE BOOK "ROADSIDE PICNIC" BY RUSSIAN SCI-FI WRITERS ARKADY AND BORIS STRUGATSKY, THE ZONE TRIP MAY BE THE MOST PROFOUND CACOPHONY CONFECTION. IN THE FILM, A STALKER IS A PROFESSIONAL GUIDE INTO A RESTRICTED MYSTERIOUS SECTOR. THE FIRST ZONE TRIP WAS CONCEIVED OF AND EXECUTED BY ETHYL KEYTONE AND URBAN SHOCKER. THE PAIR SERVED AS LICENSED ESCORTS, CONDUCTING A GROUP IN THE EXPLORATION OF THE STRANGE LOCALE KNOWN AS COVINA AND THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONS OF LOS ANGELES.**

“The Zone is the “Secret” that any society needs in order to exist and maintain its authority, it is the taboo area of memory and the past that is closed off for investigation and has constantly to be entered or “probed” by misfits if the moral health of society is to survive.\*”

of *Rough Draft*. I was certain in my ability to conduct an “out of town” event. One night, either at an event or at a spontaneous event (many of those happened when we were all bored and nothing was in the newsletter for that week), I found out that a fellow Cacophonist, Phil Bewley, was from the same LA suburb. The first Zone Trip began that moment with the idea of entering this tiny, suburban enclave as a Zone: recording the findings, exploring the unimaginable secrets, and possibly finding

the mysterious center where illusions were realized, or broken.

Our first arrival in The Zone happened at a gas station in LA County, somewhere just over the Grapevine. Driving all night, we took a moment for a pit stop. I noticed astro-turf in the “garden” area of the gas station. Moments later, I spotted a piece of car chrome, mangled and left on the side of the road to be forgotten. And I knew I had found the “key” to The Zone. We drew a line in the dirty astro-turf and held the key above our heads as we carefully stepped over the line and out of our real lives, willing ourselves to enter this alternate narrative, conscious of the fact that our reality would forever be changed.

The Zone concept took hold and many other Cacophonists acted as Stalkers, leading intrepid explorers to other Zones. *Into the Zone* became about finding that interesting place and going there with a complete belief in the journey as the message. A trust that the place will reveal the events that will unfold. The bleak playa of the Nevada desert, Mexico in search of fireworks and eclipses, other cities in which abandoned buildings needed exploring or normality needed a wake up call; all became Zone destinations. Because, simply put: *The Zone* is a place we reach inside ourselves, we bring it with us, we carry that constantly shifting, tricky, dangerous, and rewarding topography in our psyches. We are the Stalkers of our own forbidden terrain. See you there.

*“Well here he is, skidded out onto the Zone like a planchette on a Ouija Board, and what shows up inside the empty circle in his brains might string together into a message, might not, hell, he’ll just have to see...”*

— *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon

**DESCENT INTO THE ZONE — PART III**  
 March 17, 18, 19. (Leave Fri., 7:30 pm, return early evening, Sunday.)

Emanations continue to grow from that “repulsively alluring” region metaphorically known (thanks to Andrei Tarkovsky) as “The Zone”; Manifesting itself concretely in the West as Southern California, SoCal; A vast wasteland dotted with wonderful treasures and surprising adventures. In our last descent, scientists from the “Covina Zone Research Project” technically succeeded in their quest, exploring and uncovering that gray suburb known only as Covina. In our careful observations of the greater LA area, we found something else, something we couldn’t measure with any known scientific instruments, something in the zone...calling us back.

We are leaving SF on Friday evening. Upon arriving in LA we will set up a homebase in some downtown motel. From there we plan to adventure and explore, perhaps meeting up with fellow cacophonists in the LA area. The itinerary is open to group consensus--(some of our experiences when last we descended: finding ourselves on rooftops of empty buildings in downtown LA, at the top of letters spelling out a city name, and finding the very spot where LA belched forth...)

We plan to rent one or more luxury vans for the atmosphere of “surreal tourism” we strive for. The cost for the weekend is reasonable and

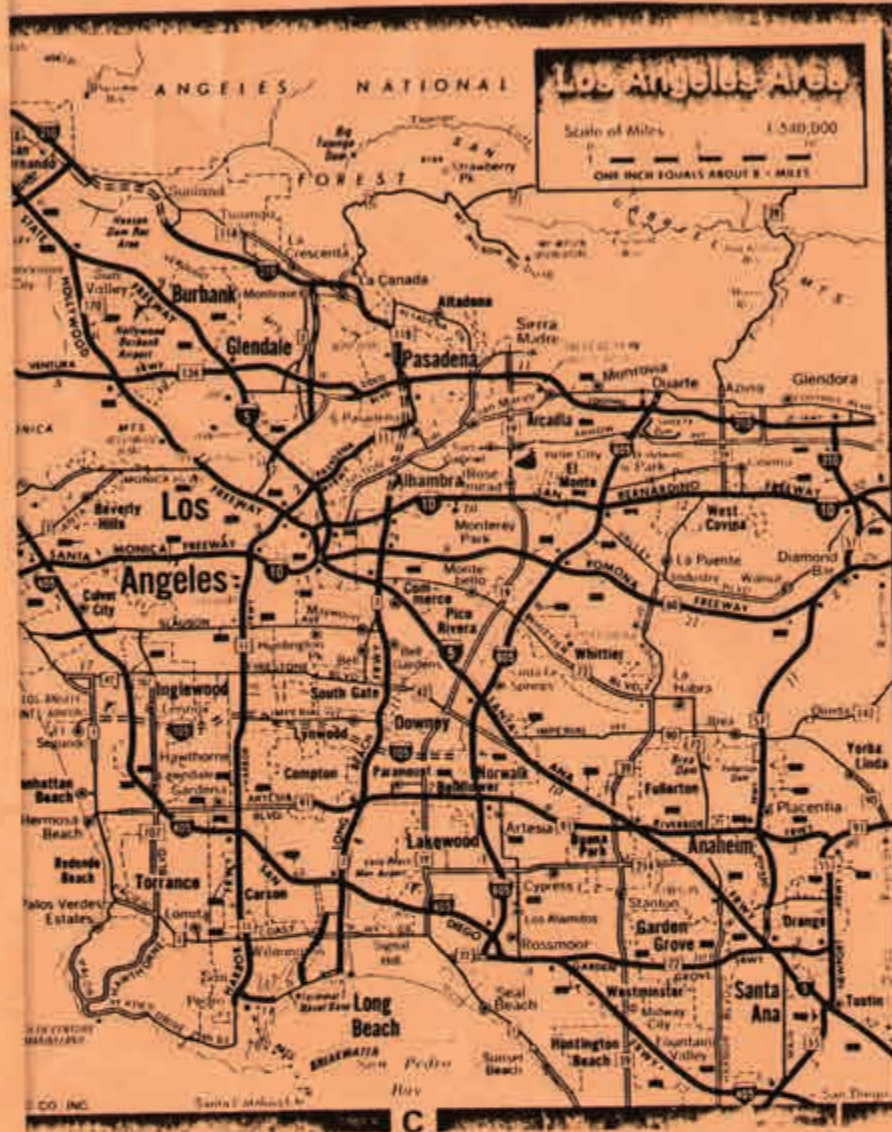
\*1994, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, Vida T. Johnson, Graham Petrie, Indiana University Press.

Above: *Rough Draft* Zone Trip write up. A previous Zone Trip would be cancelled mere days before the event because of the Loma Prieta earthquake. Facing page: Zone Trippers glean cosmic messages from the low flying jets in a bleak landscape known formerly as the upscale beachside enclave of Surfridge. After much litigation and relocation, the neighborhood was razed due to the overwhelming cacophony of passing jet engines.



Descent into the Zone  
Part 1-

# JOURNEY TO COVINA



**Royal Viking Motel**

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ACROSS THE STREET FROM ST. VINCENTS HOSPITAL



# Northridge High School

Covina California

This Certifies That

COVINA... The word bounces around in my mind like a soaked newspaper. Going nowhere fast. The memories can be devastating.

Playing all day in the summer heat, typical kid stuff, then laying in bed that night with lungs hurting from breathing. "Smog alerts" that kept us from playing P.E., (we sat around in the Gym and listened to records). Being a teenager with nowhere to go and the Los Angeles County Sheriff always more than willing to harrass you just for *being a teenager with nowhere to go*. The sameness of the houses and the mentality behind those houses. The *whiteness* of the place. The schools with teachers who seemed to believe that ignorance is bliss...

I remember the special assembly we had in elementary school for Walt Disney when he died, watching the reruns of JFK's assasination on the TV they rolled into the classroom. We watched the World Series on the same TV (if the Dodgers were playing). I had an Algebra teacher in High School who was such a lousy teacher that I stood up in class one day and told him just how bad of a teacher he was, then I walked out of the room. I can still hear him screaming after me "That will be a truant, Galbraith!"

OK, it can't be as bad as i remember. There must have been some shining moments. But they are all tied up in leaving. Camping in the mountains, trips to the beach, ventures throughout the Western States in our 1964 Volkswagon Bus. Oh yes, I remember standing on the corner watching the forest fire in the Angeles National Forest crest the ridge of the mountains that were 6 miles from my house. That was an amazing sight.

I bet that kids can grow up there now and not even know there are mountains a stone's throw away, and i'm sure it hasn't gotten any easier to breathe. Why do people still choose to live there?

Good question.

Ignorance is Bliss, i guess.





JANUARY '89  
and beyond...

**DESCENT INTO THE ZONE**

Part II: return to Covina  
Fri-Sun, 6-8 January 1989  
Due to the overwhelming success of our first journey to Covina (see November *Rough Draft*), we have decided to return. This journey will include additional activities involving the greayer Loz Angeleez area. We've added sleep opportunities and comfort zones for your touring pleasure. Printed prospectus available upon request. Consider this your last chance for an enlightening scientific examination of a cultural Dinosaur. We will leave at approximately 9 pm, Friday, and plan to return Sunday afternoon.  
Meet—>8:30 pm, 681 9th Ave., San Francisco  
Info—>Phil, or Caré,

**DINOS AND DATE SHAKES**

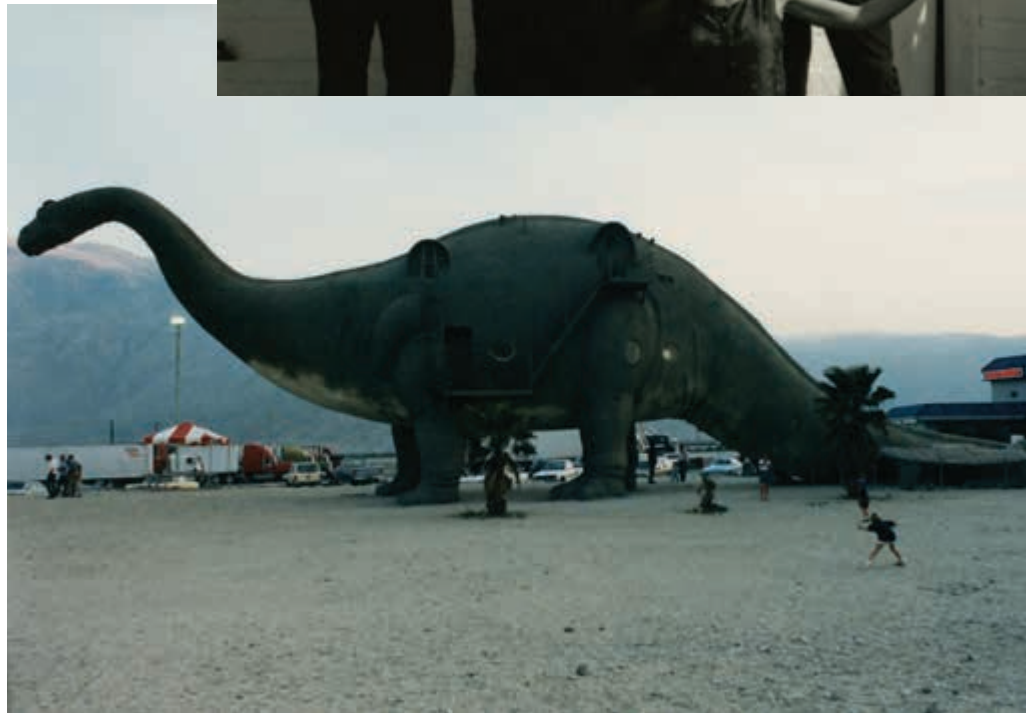
Lucija Kordic

- Shield's Date Farm!
- Hadley's fruit stand!
- Cement Dinosaurs!
- Date Shakes!

I'm not sure how I managed this one, but imagine a motley assortment of Bay Area types driving to Indio and the Coachella Valley almost two decades before the Festival phenomenon played host to Tupac Shakur's hologram—all because I "needed" a date shake.

With most details tarnished and reduced to now-faded bullet-points, it's more than possible we were exactly at Latitude 34° 5' 24.03"N, Longitude 117° 53' 25.22"W (aka the raw suburb of Covina, California, in the Park) when I posed a simple question and tested the wanderlust of the latest Zone crew. "Who wants to drive an extra 80 miles east for a date shake?" Hands shot up, I'd like to think unanimously, and Auto Club of California maps and/or Thomas Guides where brought out to plot the next leg of our journey.

As if returning to Covina wasn't enough nostalgia for one day—I

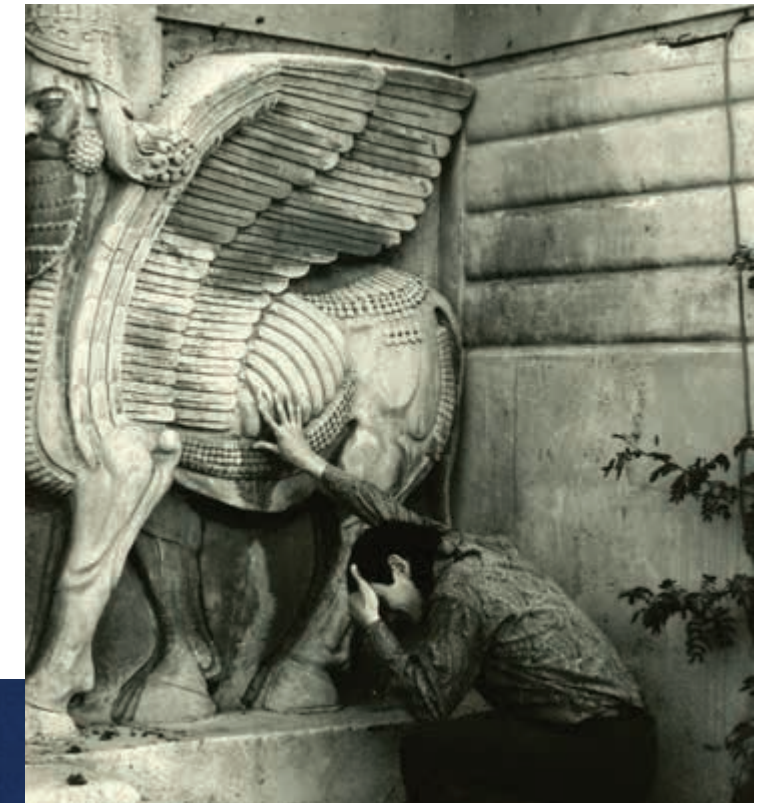


Previous pages: Zine and ephemera from the first Cacophony Zone Trip. Starting in Covina, the crew toured some of the stranger locales to be found in the LA basin. Above: Zone crew Phil Bewley, Steve Mobia, M2, Sven Serrano, Lucija Kordic, Marci Murray, Bob Gridley, and Melmoth pose outside the National Date Festival Fairgrounds in Indio, CA. Below: The Brontosaurus at the Cabazon Dinosaurs off Hwy 10, just west of Palm Springs, CA.

was about to recover an early childhood memory of a beverage I'm certain exists nowhere outside of Indio, California. And dragging a few others with me.

Willingly.

But that was the charm of the Cacophony Society—a few intrepid folks taking a road trip to explore abandoned LA buildings and decommissioned fire engines as suburban playground structures could easily morph into a quest for regional (non-alcoholic) beverages. Throw in the Cabazon dinosaur structures and "Romance and Sex Life of the Date" video at Shield's Date Farm to further an already eccentric adventure. And I was indulged with a not-yet-faded adulthood memory of the date shake well worth the extra 160 mile roundtrip.



The TAZ started appearing in odd journals in the late '80s. Many Cacophonists read Hakim Bey's essays on the Temporary Autonomous Zone, pleased to find an enthusiastic, well developed, and poetic description of what they had already been manifesting organically.

**Poetic Terrorism**

Hakim Bey

WEIRD DANCING IN ALL-NIGHT computer-banking lobbies. Unauthorized pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earth-works as bizarre alien artifacts strewn in State Parks. Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave Poetic-Terrorist objects. Kidnap someone & make them happy. Pick someone at random & convince them they're the heir to an enormous, useless & amazing fortune—say 5000 square miles of Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in Bombay, or a collection of alchemical mss. Later they will come to realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, & will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence.

Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in places (public or private) where you have experienced a revelation or had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience, etc.

Dress up. Leave a false name. Be legendary. The best PT is against the law, but don't get caught. Art as crime; crime as art.



Above: M2 worships at the abandoned Sampson Tire & Rubber Company factory in the City of Commerce. The Assyrian architectural motif saved this amazing building from being razed years later as the building was transmogrified into a retail goods "outlet store." Below: The Zone Crew visit Simon Rodia's Watts Towers. The Towers are a collection of 17 interconnected structures, two of which reach heights of over 99 feet. The Towers were built by Rodia in his spare time over a period of 33 years, from 1921 to 1954.

# ROUGH DRAFT

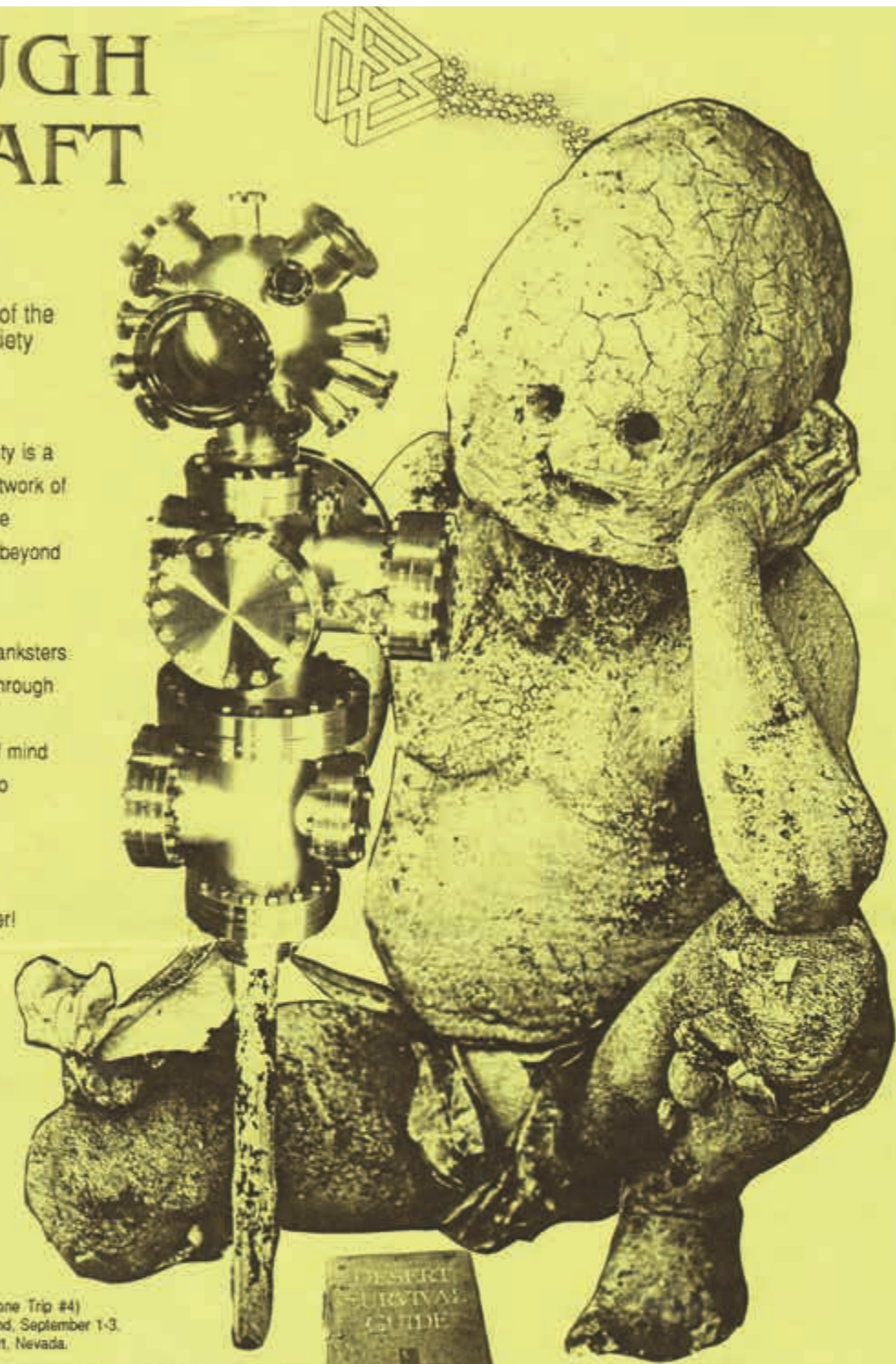
ISSUE #48  
SEPTEMBER 1990

The Official Organ of the  
SF Cacophony Society

The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society.

We are the Merry Pranksters of the 90's, traveling through the social landscape, dispensing a variety of mind challenging activities to everyone.

You may already be a member!



**Bad Day At Black Rock (Zone Trip #4)**  
When: Labor day weekend, September 1-3.  
Where: Black Rock Desert, Nevada.  
RSVP:

An established Cacophony tradition, the Zone Trip is an extended event that takes us outside of our local area of time and place. On this particular expedition, we shall travel to a vast, desolate, white expanse stretching onward to the horizon in all directions... A place where you could gain nothing or lose everything and no one would ever know. A place well-beyond that which you think you understand. We will be accompanied by the Burning Man, a 40 foot tall wooden icon which will travel with us into the Zone and there meet with destiny. This excursion is an opportunity to leave your old self and be reborn through the cleansing fires of the trackless, pure desert.

- Activities include:
- The en-route ceremony of the caravan crossing into the Zone boundary. Bring with you something of strong symbolic value.
  - Campsite erection in the tradition of modern dadastic nomadic Gypsies.
  - The construction of a brick oven for the baking of bread.
  - A group ritual requiring your participation to raise and immolate the Burning Man.
  - Night-time viewing of relevant desert videos on a big screen.
  - Semi-formal evening cocktail party with music. Bring your favorite CDs.
  - Visit to a natural local hot springs.
  - Other activities as we make them up.

This event is co-hosted by the Cacophony Society, Burning Man Committee, and the Black Rock Desert Rangers. Special thanks to Dogedoo Productions.



**Objet Trouve-Haute Trash Fashion Show**  
When: Friday & Saturday, September 14 & 15  
Where: Nevada Theater, Nevada City, CA  
Another long distance event in September? YES!

This event has been going on for 7 years up in Nevada City and is a fashion show in which all the modeled clothing has been constructed from materials scavenged from the local dumpsites, and designed and assembled by people with names such as: Prima Debris, Disposables, House of Original Sin, Rayona Visqueen, Polly Ethylene, Recyclazetta and Venus de Mylar. This may be the last year this show is held so we think it is important to make this important cultural journey. If you intend to go, it is important to get your tickets in advance, because they always sell out. You can purchase your tickets from Synergy II Bookstore, 3150 Spring Street, Nevada City, CA 95959, phone 530-893-1111. Tickets are \$8 per one night or \$15 for a 2-night pass.

**Cacophony-like Minds**

When: Monday, September 17th, 7:30 pm.  
Where: Sacred Grounds Coffeeshop, 2095 Hayes at Cole, SF.  
Everyone is welcome at the monthly "meeting" of the Cacophony Society, when we sit around remembering past events and thinking of new hare-brained schemes for the future.

"Anything worth doing in the first place is worth running into the ground."  
— Stuart Mangrum

## Bringing Burning Man to the Black Rock Desert

Kevin Evans

Labor Day weekend, 1989. I, with my roommates P Segal, Dawn Stott, and Cynthia Kolnick, attended a wind sculpture event in the Black Rock Desert sponsored by the creative collective "Planet X" in Gerlach, Nevada. We constructed and hauled a lightweight, mobile, canopy bed sculpture on top of a tiny sedan out to the remote, inhospitable area in Nevada. The surreal locale combined with mobile sculptures was both incredible and inspiring.

That weekend was one that had a great and lasting impact on my life. I never wanted to leave. The desert attracted and stirred me; I knew I had to go back.

When I returned to the Bay Area and started my final year in art school, I rallied a few friends and schoolmates around the idea of planning a Labor Day weekend trip to the Black Rock desert. I had been reading essays by Hakim Bey and his ideas struck a chord. At that time I was experimenting with the technique of forcefully augmenting or destroying parts of my artwork as a meditation on impermanence and flexible reaction to sudden change. These concepts fused into a plan to generate a creative, temporary incident in the Black

Rock with a central theme, the ritual destruction and immolation of sculptures and art constructed for the event, with the peculiar, empty location as a stage set.

For an insolvent, young, and naive art student, this vision seemed far too grand and expensive to accomplish alone. I decided to present the scheme as a Cacophony event, a "Zone Trip," to fellow Cacophonist John Law. Other members of the group were later recruited (M2, aka Danger Ranger) and logistical planning commenced.

A few months from the target date of the expedition, many of us from the Cacophony Society attended what was to be the last Baker Beach burn of Burning Man in San Francisco. Fortunately, via the intervention of local authorities, the monolithic figurine was not razed. Amidst chants of "burn it anyway!" and pagan-like drumming, a few of us Cacophonists, including Miss P and Dawn, thought it would be a great idea to invite the architects of the wooden construct along for our voyage to the bizarre setting, making it the biggest, most elaborate piece of firewood - a glorious conflagration.

## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**ZONE TRIP FOUR**

THIS DADAIST EXCURSION MATERIALIZED IN THE SUMMER OF 1989 AFTER A GROUP OF CACOPHONISTS ATTENDED A WIND SCULPTURE FESTIVAL HOSTED BY THE PLANET X COLLECTIVE AND LOCATED IN NEVADA'S BLACK ROCK DESERT. ON SUMMER SOLSTICE 1990, CACOPHONY ASSISTED IN WHAT WOULD BE BURNING MAN'S LAST ATTEMPTED BURN ON SAN FRANCISCO'S BAKER BEACH. WHEN THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES FORBADE THE ILLEGAL IMMOLATION, CACOPHONY INTERVENED, OFFERING TO MAKE THE WOODEN EFFIGY A CENTERPIECE FOR THE LONG-PLANNED DESERT ZONE TRIP

Facing page: This issue of *Rough Draft* included a write-up for the first Burning Man in the Black Rock Desert.

**BURNING MAN: THE FIRST YEAR IN THE DESERT**

By Louis M. Brill

Reportage/Illustration by Pierre "Mr. Lucky" Merkl

The celebration of Burning Man's annual fire ceremony began in 1986, created by Larry Harvey and Jerry James. For the next five years, its annual fire party was held at Baker Beach in San Francisco. In 1990, while being prepared at Baker's Beach, the park police interceded to prevent the culminating conflagration of the sculpture. This was a transitional moment for Burning Man; the event evolved to a new location, a change of date, and the beginning of a new meaning for the celebration. This is a recounting of my introduction to Burning Man in San Francisco.

**BURNING MAN: FROM BEACH TO DESERT**

My discovery of Burning Man was through the San Francisco Cacophony Society, an organization of randomly gathered free spirits who surf the bleeding edge of culture, space, and time. A 1990, a Cacophony newsletter item invited interested people to meet in downtown San Francisco to help assemble a wooden sculpture to be burned at a San Francisco beach. The building area for this event was in a parking lot, in San Francisco near 11th & Folsom Streets. I showed up that weekend with other Cacophonists, walked into the parking lot and encountered a strange sight of unrecognizable wooden structures placed around on the ground, wood saws and drills screaming their song as they cut into the wood. There was also a huge pile of rope lying around and several saw-horses waiting for these wooden set pieces to be placed upon them.

Gradually the screaming wood cutters were replaced by shouted instructions, as small groups of people collected each part and assembled it into its final form. I watched in fascination as these strange wooden shapes transformed into a large torso connecting arms, legs, and a head into a unified human form. The final connection was a rope tied to its chest. The completed sculpture, lying on its back, was positioned at the entrance of the parking lot. We all gathered in front of it, picking up and pulling on the rope, lifting the sculpture into its final vertical position.

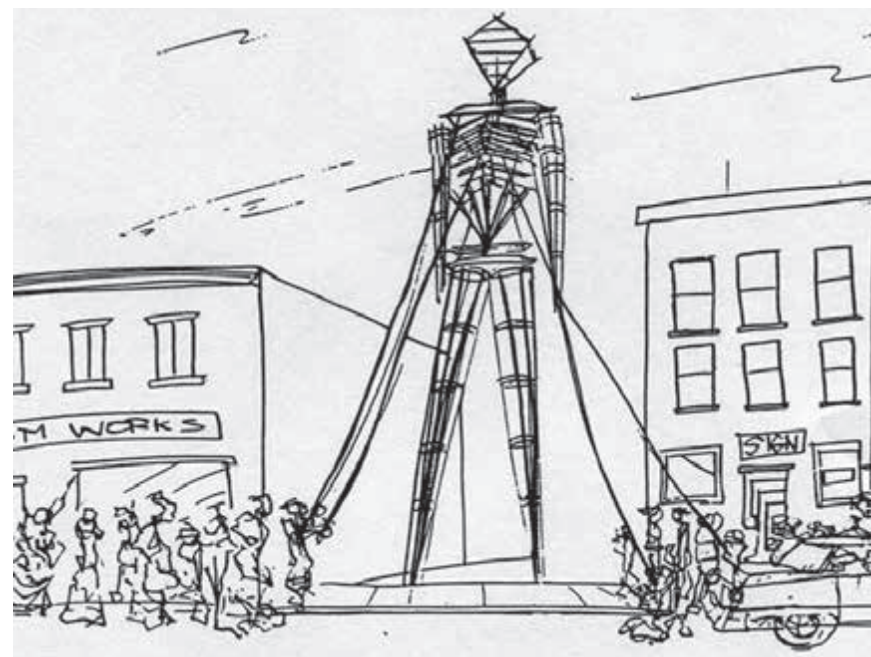
In lifting the Man upright, the group of people pulling on the

lifting rope extended out into the street. As the line stretched backwards, some of us walked out to stop traffic while the Man was being pulled erect. For the drivers in those cars it must have been an incredible sight, seeing this group of people pulling on a rope, lifting this enormous wooden sculpture between the buildings, poised and paused, as if waiting for something.

**BAKER BEACH**

As we prepared the effigy for Baker Beach, we learned that the Golden Gate Park Police (GGNRA) had 'discovered' this event and decided, because of the potential fire hazard to the surrounding hillside, that we could not burn the sculpture. The park police were represented by a lone officer on a motor bike, who had come to Baker Beach to issue his edict. We negotiated a compromise; we could build and erect The Man, but not burn him.

Several Cocophonists, including John Law, Kevin Evans, and P Segal, had proposed the Black Rock desert in Northern Nevada as an alternate site. After investigating other potential sites along the coast of Northern California and discovering that none of them were suitable for the Burning Man ceremony, Larry had accepted on faith that the Black Rock just might be the place for the wooden statue's intended immolation; it was then a matter of organizing the trip, renting a truck to transport the Man, and getting our butts out to the desert. It was also decided that Labor Day weekend would be a perfect time to reassemble the gathering around the Man.



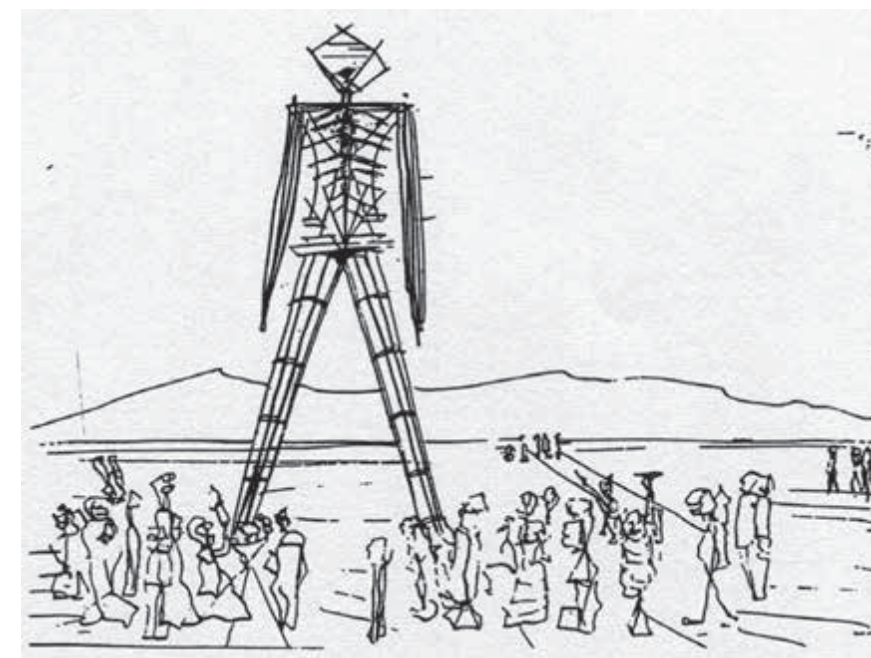
68

**LEAVING SAN FRANCISCO**

On the day of departure, there were about eighty attendees, who collected together at our launch point in Golden Gate Park. As people showed up, they brought back packs, suitcases, duffel bags, ice coolers, camping gear, hat boxes, and garment bags. Most of this was piled in front of the Ryder truck. (Let's not forget the woman who brought only her massage table, no food, no extra clothes, no water, nothing else!)

As people gathered round, there was this great electricity in the air. From our urban enclaves, we were seeking a land of opposites. Here we were, children of the city used to running water, television, and buying groceries whenever we wanted. Now, we were all preparing for a journey to a desolate and stark region of primitive expanse with wild weather and days of 100 + degrees of sun-baked landscape. The Black Rock was a playa, a dried lake bed encircled by a mountain range, sitting undisturbed for the last 14,000 years—a flat beach head of dried mud for hundred and hundreds of miles. And we were going there.

"O.K, let's do it!" The back door of the Ryder truck was opened, our group jumped up and into the vehicle, others formed a fire brigade and began to feed the luggage into the truck. As the trunks and suitcases flew into the vehicle, it felt like an evacuation from some kind of natural disaster, which, in a way, it was, as we were escaping the rat race of urban living.



As others gathered to watch, I was struck by the enormity of the moment. We were packing up and getting ready to leave the city, to do what? It didn't matter; it was the big A—an adventure into the unknown.

Eighty strangers had suddenly become eighty friends, who had made a commitment to follow this strange wooden sculpture to the desert and live with it 'til its last moments, when wood was to become ash and smoke.

Did we know what we were doing? Probably not. Did we care? Yeah! We knew that whatever we were doing, it was different. If only for that weekend, we were going to put some meaning into a special experience, creating a new version of an ancient pagan ritual that was actually thousands of years old. In Cacophony, we called these adventures "Zone Trip." The Zone was some other dimensional place. It could be the past, the future, something weird, it didn't matter, we were going there.

The truck was loaded, and its back door slammed shut. People scurried to their cars—it was time to get out of Dodge. We formed a loose caravan and drove from San Francisco, endlessly into the night. With the darkness, the unfamiliar highways, and the wrong turns, it was a miracle that we even got there, but we did.

**ENTERING THE ZONE**

Just after dawn, we arrived in the town of Gerlach (pop. 250), literally the last town before the desert. After breakfast at Bruno's Resort (one of the few cafes in the town), the group reformed and caravanned out onto the road leading to the desert. About 6 or 7 miles later, we left the road, driving directly onto the playa and stopped about 100 feet from the road. We all got out of our cars as one member drew a long line on the desert floor creating the 'Zone gateway.' This was one of our Cacophony rituals, for the Zone as we defined it took on many forms: it could be a weird house, a particularly strange neighborhood (like Covina, CA), or a desolate, deserted warehouse. Today it was The Black Rock Desert, at the base of a mountain range in Northern Nevada.

69

We crossed the line. We were definitely not in Kansas anymore. As far the eye could see, it was flat, flat flat. The 'playa,' which is a dried lake bed, is rated as the second largest and flattest (the Bonneville Salt Flats being numero uno) part of the United States, 400 square miles of a flat-as-a-board range area. Some people even claim you can see the curvature of the earth. Whatever. As one looked out into the desert playa, there may have been nothing there, but there is everything to see. One merely has to know where to look.

After a few minutes of glad handing and yelping in delight, we all got back in our cars and drove into the desert, to find our place, to set up camp, and bring the Man to his rightful new home. We had arrived! Although one part of the desert looks like another, we found our spot, pitched our tents and settled in. The camp quickly became a community as we all came to terms with the surrounding desert.

As this was our first time at Black Rock, there was not much to do in the way of planned activities. There were the hot springs, which we took full advantage of, and of course the surrounding desert to walk around in and appreciate. And let's not forget the intense wind storm which knocked down just about every tent awning as

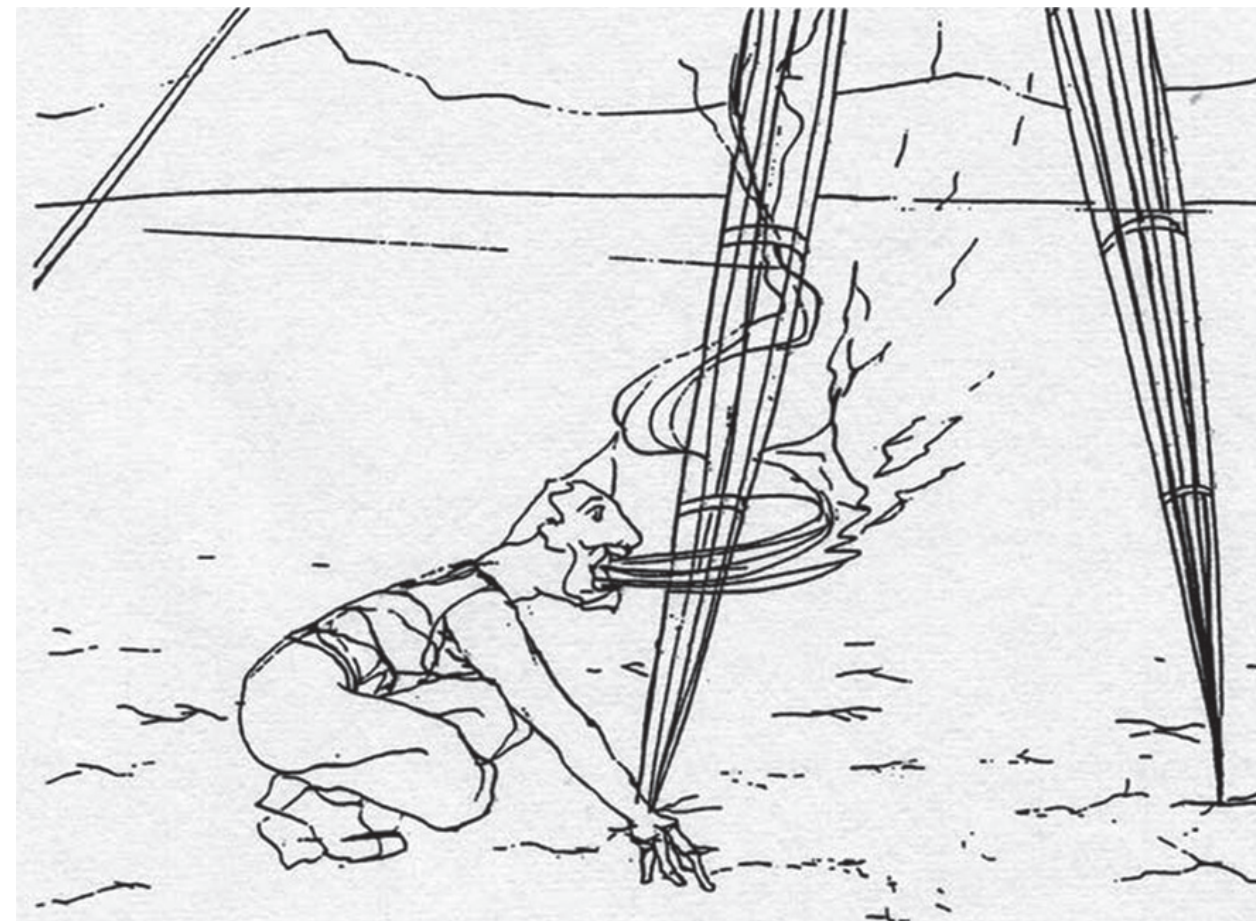
well as our first effort to build a center of camp 'tent' to hang out in during the heat of the day. But it was OK; these were lessons to be learned. We knew we would be back, so we needed to understand one way or the other what the land was like, if we were going to live on it each forthcoming Labor Day weekend.

Having settled in, we began the process of setting up the Burning Man sculpture. His wooden parts were quickly assembled and the sculpture was laid out on the desert floor, ready to go vertical, to become the watchtower of our camp.

The moment had arrived - it was to be our first lifting ceremony in the desert. The entire camp had gathered in front of the sculpture, standing next to a thick rope that emanated from the sculpture and extended onwards for about 100 feet. On a series of commands, we lifted the rope up, and began slowly stepping back, pulling on the rope. Quickly the sculpture began to rise. Soon it was standing upright. We pegged it to the playa floor and began cheering and hooting in joy.

**THE BLACK ROCK DESERT**

Black Rock desert is largely empty with absolutely nothing on the playa area (no trees, no grass, no hills - nothing). It



is an emptiness whose desolate flatness is awe inspiring. Run-off from the winter rains in the distant mountains that surrounded us have fed the playa for thousands and thousands of years.

The playa holds forth with all kinds of natural wonders such as hot springs and dust devils, the one hundred foot circular columns of dust that dance across the desert floor. There are moments of tremendous silence, and moments where breezes turn with sudden ferocity into blinding white out, wind driven dust storms which have been clocked at as much as 50 miles per hour. In an unforgettable moment, I personally saw a fully assembled tent spinning end over end in one such storm.

**SUNDAY EVENING**

The final moment had arrived, as the countdown closed in on Burning Man's rendezvous with its flaming destiny. Fellow Cocaphonist and former carnival performer, David "Flammo" Warren had the honors of initiating its baptism. Stepping up to the Man with a torch, he ignited his breath and a huge tongue of fire leapt forwards from his mouth, bathing the Man's wooden legs.

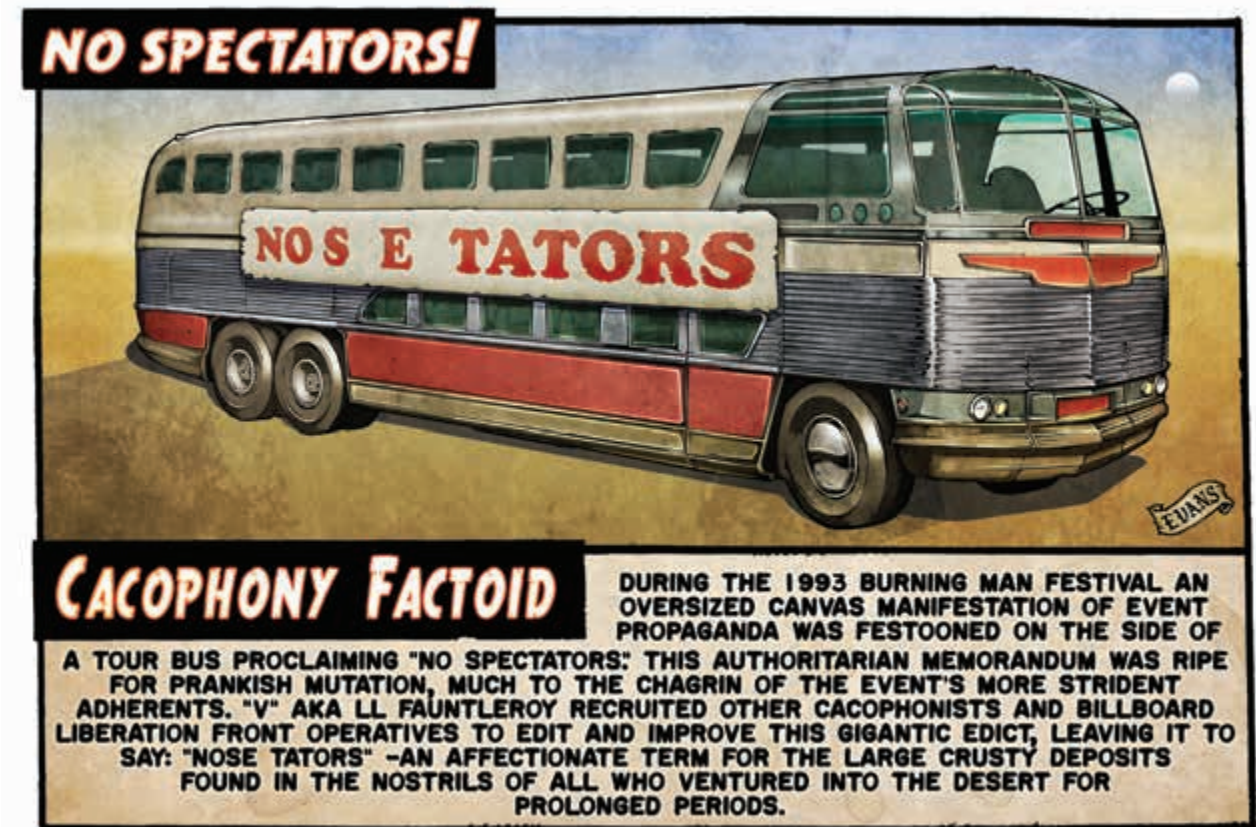
The flame clinging to the Man began to climb upwards, engulfing his legs, then the torso, quickly reaching to immerse the entire sculpture. It became a spectacle of enormous magnitude, the flaming statue illuminating

the surrounding area, revealing the awe struck and cheering crowd who watched as the statue quickly lived up to its name. As the flames reached the head, there were miniature explosions as the fireworks blasted off, arcing over the fire with a halo of sparkling star bursts crowning the event.

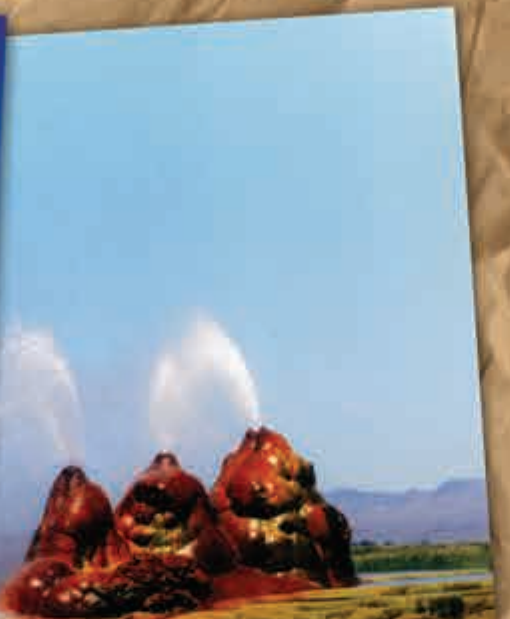
Dean Gustafson, a fellow Cacophonist and a musician, pounded on his drums, setting a beat in time as the flames crackled around the Man. He recalled playing his drums with as much power as he could muster. "I was a soloist (the only time there was one drummer accompanying the burn) and that gave me the added motivation to play my heart out, trying to sound like ten drummers in one. I played until my arms and hands were consumed in fiery pain. I played long after the Man had fallen."

After the sculpture was consumed by flames, the campers gather round in celebration, with a formal cocktail party. Every one was dressed in party finery, women in their elegant gowns, and men in tuxedos, others in bizarre costumes. Drinks were hosted, people were toasted, the air was filled with smoke and joy.

The next morning, we had gathered round the blackened remains of Burning Man. He was nothing but charred wood, ash, and a vague outline of his final position as he lay on the ground.



Following pages: Images of the first and second years in the Black Rock Desert with Cacophony and the Burning Man, 1990 and 1991.



**INSIDE ‘DESERT SITWORKS’**

William Binzen

Dateline: Labor Day, 1993, BLACK ROCK DESERT, NEVADA. Something’s happening here -- urban artists are collaborating on projects realized in the desert. Forsaking convenience stores and the studio, they—we are living and working for periods on a remote hotplate of silt and ash, where you can see curvature of the earth.

Art in the desert. The question arises, why? And, so what?

*Without limits, there is no tension. Without tension, is no progression.*

—Guru Garaj Key

Out here, without our exoskeleton (the car, gas, cooler, and so on), we’re dead meat. Just knowing this adds an edge. Freedom at a price. It sharpens our sense of what we can and cannot do, tests us. On the playa, mirages recede as we drive, tantalizing us. The last sunrays appear as a laser-thin line, miles long. If you’re brain-dead, you won’t get inspired. Otherwise... what can we do in this place? This place where, when light and heat cause objects and actions stand out in relief, and become altered, taking on new significance, new perception, new inspiration.

Making art in the desert requires that we deal with this vast, undifferentiated space of the playa and environs—and define the edges, or sets of limits, the context within which art can be convened. Without codes, conventions, sets of limits, there is no language, no consensus reality, no art.

Ecological, holistic, pantheistic, and group-dynamic

dimensions... these may be easier to engage in the desert— where, stripped of our normal baggage and cultural distractions, we find a proving ground, a crucible for experimental projects and the development of ideas.

DESERT SITWORKS is an experiment in temporary community. We are made up entirely of artists, in multiple disciplines, performers, musicians, and back seat philosophers ready to stand up and talk. Here, in the desert, there is no human audience for our spectacle – we play for ourselves, or to find ourselves, or for amusement, or invention. This is about art as self-discovery, personal and interpersonal healing, and the conjuring of new life-ways, new modes of being and becoming, and sharing culture.

For our 48-hour participatory performance at Trego, we invoked a Ceremonial Witness, the Muse of Drama, who sits on a portable throne, the “Witness Chair.” The person sitting in the chair holds the space for drama, and directs (when necessary) our co-evolving, human mosaic, or “Muse::aic” of improvised form and sound, conceived as a Hero’s Journey, using archetypal systems for exploring life and the mind, such as the Kabbalah and Tarot.

We moved the Witness Chair to each location where improvisation takes us, establishing context and sets of formal limits for the scenes about to play out. A number of people had contributed to the script, which was based on our human life span (or cycle) from pre-birth to after death.

Desert Siteworks has convened at three of the hot springs

around the perimeter of the playa – Black Rock Spring, Trego, and Bordello Springs (aka Frogpond). In locally siting a project, we work with the topography – with sand dunes, arroyos, dirt roads, and scrub—to establish a harmonious, terrain-respecting layout. A fanciful, small village springs up, complementing its site. We encourage campsite decoration and vehicle camouflage to minimize the presence of “standard issue” images like cars, trucks, and RVs, and to promote the individual camps as artful, as part of the art. We made reusable wickiups (structure-as-sculpture), including the Desert Yurt (camp center, living room, and communal kitchen), and the Tower Pavilion, a four-sided structure (in plan view, based on a Native American swastika). We used

the Pavilion for ritual observances.

Examples of site-specific projects at Trego: Jeffrey Harris erected his Ranch Portal, with inlaid coins and Americana, where the entrance road rounds a dune and one first gets a view of the site; Tom Trombley installed the Ditch Serpent, a 60’ long wind-activated “spinal column” in the runoff ditch from the hot spring; Pepe Ozan built his (original) “Lingam,” rising out of a natural yoni, or feminine recess in the dunes; John Law made two site-specific neon installations, one submerged in the Trego “hot ditch” outflow from the springs, the other, a giant, yellow neon Dune Arc, that followed the rise and fall of the largest sand dune.



Above: *Desert Siteworks* events were hosted at various hot springs ringing the Black Rock Desert. Some participants of this “experiment in living art” went on to form the performance troupe Dream Circus, which spawned a legion of similar troupes at Burning Man over the following years. The “Intentional Community” philosophy espoused by Burning Man was birthed during the *Desert Siteworks* events. Facing page: During the *Desert Siteworks* event in 1995 at Trego Springs, Nevada, multiple earth works and site specific installations were integrated into a comprehensive and beautiful tableau.





Dean Gustafson made a precision 20' long working sundial, laid out with local black stones, calculated and aligned; Todd Reed made a working clay kiln, fabricated on site using sun-dried bricks of local clay and a flue pipe from a nearby junkyard; Kirk Roberts carved "dreamtime"-inspired images into a row of old wooden fence posts along the RR tracks, other standing posts were accessioned with plaster masks and metal assemblages by Sandra Noria; Harry Pariser dug glyphs into the ground around a male fertility totem made of clay and rocks.

Al Honig placed his figurative, high-finish chrome sculptures on the footbridge and shore; Suzanne Couture made an altarpiece for the Pavilion; Larry Ackerman presented multi-image slide projections that transformed the night desert into a visual force field.

William Binzen made a series of ten Desert Navigation Locaters, the Desert Yurt, Tower Pavilion, and the 30' truss footbridge connecting the domestic half of SITEWORKS with the pedestrian-only ritual/performance/sculpture side.

Fundamental to DESERT SITEWORKS is performance, especially improvisation seeking the roots of ritual. During the 1993 project, convened over the 4th of July at Trego Hot Springs, Lane Savadove, Paradox, Michael Callahan and the Directors' Corps convened a continuous, 48 hour,

group improvisation based on a simple script of a human life span, from pre-birth to after death. Four directors each took four-hour turns in the Witness Chair and held the space, made it safe, and defined the "proscenium" by their angle of vision, by holding out arms to indicate space. The performance was challenging, given desert heat and trance states, the intensity and psychic drama experienced by some participants, and the expanded time frame set for it. Still, messages came up through the 8-ball. If, in pre-history, what we call "art" began as a set of tools in the kit bag of shamanic, healing practices, as some have suggested; and if contemporary art often fails to address substantive issues or real issues in substantive ways, then the desert and these Siteworks are a powerful place to exorcise demons and to reconnect with primal experience, poised between Self, Object, and Other.

In this context, art is not primarily an abstraction or a market activity or entertainment for a bored or jaded public, but rather a fundamental means of defining our context, our "space" in life -- just as our performance and music mark our "time."

How we collaborate and how we work out interpersonal problems becomes part of the process, involving age-old tensions of leadership versus collaboration.



## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**DESERT SITE WORKS**

IN 1993, THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY UNITED WITH PHOTOGRAPHER WILLIAM BINZEN IN NEVADA'S BLACK ROCK DESERT TO COLLABORATE IN CREATING AN EXPERIMENTAL AND TEMPORARY LIVING ART COMMUNITY. THIS ANNUAL VENTURE TRANSFORMED NATIVE THERMAL SPRINGS INTO INTERACTIVE RITUALISTIC INSTALLATIONS. BINZEN'S BRAINCHILD AND ITS PHILOSOPHY WOULD BECOME A PRIMARY INSPIRATION FOR THE EVOLVING ETHOS OF THE BURNING MAN FESTIVAL. THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S DETAILED "CAPTURED TABLEAUS" ARE AMONG THE FINEST AND MOST AMBITIOUS IMAGES EVER MADE OF THESE SURREAL, INHOSPITABLE DESERT LOCATIONS.

Facing page: The first *Desert Siteworks* took place on the Applegate-Lassen Trail, which was originally pioneered by early settlers of California and Oregon in covered wagons. Below the jet-black crags of the Black Rock, over twenty miles off road, lies Black Rock Spring, a shallow round hot pool covering viscous mud. The crew performed in the spring framed by submerged neon as photographer Binzen shot multiple-exposure images.

**FUTURE EVENTS IN THE PLANNING****ZONE TRIP**

When: March 8 through 11

Where: Mexico

**Night of the Thousand Tortitos** - Twenty miles north of Mexico City there is a small town where the main industry is producing fireworks. Each year the town of Tultepec throws a bash where the pyrotechnic fuse burns for a week and the tequila flows like water. The festivities include large towers covered with pinwheels and sparklers and a whacked out night-time running of the bulls where giant piñatas race through narrow streets shooting fireworks into the crowd. If you get bored you can always visit the nearby Mayan Pyramid of the Sun.

**How:** We'll converge at the Houston, Texas airport for a flight to Mexico City, from there, rent cars for the trip to Tultepec. **R.S.V.P. deadline Feb. 22**

Info and R.S.V.P.: (415)

Bring safety glasses.

**Night of the Living Elvis** - Come dressed as Elvis, Priscilla or the Colonel (as in chicken).

**Last Flight** - Visualize the scene at an SFO bar where a group of drunk airline pilots are audibly complaining about going on duty within the

**CACOPHONISTAS 13**

Stuart Mangrum

**Day One • Friday, March 8th**

San Francisco — Mexico City — Coacalco

Flying in under a skidmark sky, past endless kilometers of sand and subdivisions, we follow a line of slowly smoking garbage fires to the airport in Mexico City. Brown clouds squeeze out a warm, foul-smelling rain. There are ten of us, too many to fit in a single vehicle, and four Cacophonistas opt to share a taxi for the long ride north. The rest of us pile into a rented VW microbus and plunge out into the late-evening traffic, not quite sure which road leads to Tultepec, but armed with a fistful of maps and willing to figure it out. Within two blocks we are lost.

There is no way to prepare for driving in Mexico City. No guide book, no video, no CD-ROM. No map can adequately explain its tortuous roads, especially not a map with the title panel obscuring twenty crucial blocks next to the airport. We roll on, clue-poor, but rich in opinion. We grow alternately panicky, combative, sullen, manic. Street names are shouted, mispronounced, muttered as asides by each passenger in turn, each consulting a different map, none of which resembles—even remotely—the geography through which we alternately hurtle and crawl, depending on each block's peculiar mood.

By the great toxic swamp of Lake Texcoco, we fill up on cheap petrol at a Pemex station and buy junk food with all the zeal of escaped prisoners, stocking up on chips and sodas and savory cheese puffs the color of exploding gasoline. The driver pays for the fuel and we return our attentions to the road.

Tultepec, the town with the fireworks, has no hotel, so we cruise a few kilometers past it to Coacalco and check into a five-story businessman's love nest called the Hotel Paraiso. Coacalco and nearby Ecatepec seem to play the San Fernando Valley in Mexico City's demented

LA fantasy, with lots of new homes for sale to yuppie commuters. "Twenty-four-hour water," the signs brag. Silver-haired Monroe, our retired college professor, notices another sign, a large banner hung up across traffic. "*Fiesta Pirotecnico de Tultepec,*" he reads aloud.

As we check into the Paraiso, we ask about our LA Cacophony friends we are supposed to meet: Dave and his traveling companion, Alan. "Big hair," my friend Melmoth says, gesturing wildly in the air above his head. "Big black hair like this." The desk clerk nods uncertainly. If they are here, they are not in their rooms.

About this time our missing foursome arrives from the airport via taxi. Turns out that instead of circling Mexico City on the outer roads, they oozed right through the heart of town, their driver stopping every few miles to ask the other cabbies for directions. No one is exceptionally happy. We have been on the road all day and crossed two time zones. Driving out to Tultepec to meet the LA contingent now seems futile. Most of the restaurants in town are closed, including the one in our hotel (shuttered permanently, we would later discover, along with the hotel bar). After a few false starts, we settle on Lyni's, a blandly sinister Mexican Lyon's with a bidet-shaped fountain in the center of the dining room. At least they have booze. We return to our hotel to medicate the long, cruel day with sleep.

**Day Two • Saturday, March 9th**

Coacalco — Tultepec

*"I have found that there ain't no surer way to find out whether you like people or hate them than to travel with them."*

—Mark Twain

Monroe is up early, pounding at our door for no apparent reason. Like clinical depressives, Paizley and I burrow into the bed and try to ignore him, but the hallway quickly fills with early-rising revelers, including the three Cacophonists from LA.

"We were out there last night for the tortitos," L.A. Dave says. "It was great—*piñatas* stuffed with *explosivos*. You can get right in the thick of things and go crazy, fire falling all around." He points at Alan, who's picked up an ugly burn wound on the bridge of his nose and a meaty, plum-colored bruise under one eye. With his wild, boot-black hair and demented grin, he looks like a D-movie zombie. "Crazy *gringos*," Dave says, shaking his head. "Nothing like it."

Like an upended tortoise set right again, our trip is suddenly back on track. Moving slowly, but moving. There are thirteen of us now, and we invade a carnitas shop en masse for breakfast. The logo on the sign shows a smiling pig waving gaily from a bucket of boiling fat. Our arrival ignites a mad rush of activity. Tables are pushed together, children are dispatched to the grocery store,



and a hard-drinking cook is roused from sleep. The coffee is terrible, made from powder, and everyone's afraid to put the local milk in it. There is much talk about colon health. Perhaps too much, but after all, we're in Mexico. "Daily Stool Report," I announce crisply into my cassette recorder, turning my head slightly from the table to feign discretion. "Firm and healthy. Group health strong despite a few sightings of lettuce, ice, and cheese consumption at Lyni's last night. Funk level low. Morale good."

We park on a side street and make our way into Tultepec's main square, stopping to buy our own pyrotechnic arsenal from a shop selling fireworks and—of all things—cake decorating supplies. Above us, the sky echoes with the concussive blasts of heavy-duty skyrockets crumping like mortars, a mariachi 1812 Overture with no orchestra, just the artillery. Whump. Whump-whump. The blasts register so low in the frequency range that they make my teeth itch.

The explosions stop abruptly at dusk, and we learn—to our disappointment—that there are no fireworks scheduled for tonight. Tomorrow night, we are promised, the flaming towers! But until then, no fun but what we make for ourselves. Several of our number immediately find a vacant lot and strike their lighters, shooting rockets at each other and igniting bombs. The rest amble among the vendors, carney booths, and funhouse rides of Tultepec's makeshift midway. Food concessions sell

cotton candy, hot pancakes with fruit, and ears of sweet corn doused in an odd mix of mayonnaise, parmesan cheese and chile powder. A businesslike 15-year-old pours cocktails she calls "*explosivos*" into hand-painted terra cotta mugs for a buck, souvenir mug included. Pineapple, orange, lime, Squirt, and your choice of booze, rimmed with vast amounts of salt and hot chile powder. Burns drinks enough of this fiery concoction to get violently ill, but Paizley's report on the Coktele Explosivo is entirely favorable.

**Day Three • Sunday, March 10th**

Coacalco — Tultepec — Coacalco

*Lady dynamite, let's dance quickly,**Let's dance and sing and dynamite everything!*

—French anarchist song of the 1880s

Questing for a decent cup of coffee, we encounter it at last in El Pollo Feliz, a barbecued chicken restaurant whose logo features a smiling chicken waving gaily from the flames of a smoking barbecue. The coffee is rich, flavored with cinnamon, and Paizley and the other aficionados of *café con leche* throw caution to the wind and let the milk flow.

"Daily stool report," I mutter into the Sony. "Firm, some gas. A few of my fellow travelers are asking around the table for Metamucil, which I take as a good sign. Morale high. Funk rising."

Above: Mona Statsven, Joe, and a friend prepare for the upcoming "International Competition" taking place in the central Tultepec City Square by stocking up on various bottles of strong local spirits.





We are getting better at ordering food, but a few of us still spin the wheel and come up losers. Vivian and Mick order soup, which turns out to be a sort of creamed something-or-other with desiccated French fries scattered on top like croutons. When Vivian's breakfast entrée finally appears, the rest of us have finished by now. She is surprised to discover that *'carnes frías'* means cold meats, not fried meats. Defeated, she glumly pokes at her plate of cold cuts, Vienna sausage and spooky-looking cheese until Paizley wraps it all up in a napkin and tucks it in her purse for the benefit of the town dogs.

We hit Tultepec around noon, and the streets are five times as thronged as the night before. Every business in town has apparently relocated for the day to the town square, and last night's vendors now share space with hundreds of food booths, clothing stores, a key maker, a bicycle repair shop, and a bewildering maze of booths selling lingerie, sweets, machine tools, whole pigs' heads, and great mountains of chickens' feet. The colonial-style church is elaborately decorated in flowers, and everyone's wearing their Sunday best. Murals in brightly colored sawdust decorate the sidewalks of the church's well-tended garden, where lovers sit in the shade on black iron benches. Brass bands play in the square and there are children everywhere: children running around chasing each other, babies drooling on mothers' shoulders, kids eating paletas and holding their grandmothers' hands. Today is the feast day of the town's patron saint, San Juan de Dios, comforter of widows and the wounded, friend to the *pirotecnicos* of Tultepec. Today is the real fiesta.

Dave knows some other *norteamericano* pyrotechnicians in

town for the show, and we swap stories about the Burning Man, anvil-blasting, and other all-American pursuits. One of them introduces us to a chipper old man with a shock of white hair and a politician's beaming smile, whose attending nephew, already drunker than any two of us, insists in slurred half-English that we must accompany the *jeffe* to a place where we will all eat and drink. Dubious but thirsty, all thirteen of us pile into a little *colectivo* microbus—along with the driver and at least nine other passengers already on board for the creaking three-block ride into the barrios. Feeling slightly claustrophobic, I opt for standing room on the back bumper with Melmoth and Burns. Inside, Señor Mick, who is more than slightly claustrophobic, struggles for control,

and everyone struggles for breath in the uncertain crush of bodies. Where the hell are we going? How are we going to get back? Who are these people? Will we ever see our families again? Whose hand is that?

The old man picks up the tab for the ride and leads us to a prosperous home with long tables set up in the courtyard. Gradually we are made to understand that he is the mayor of Tultepec, Señor Antonio, and that this home belongs to his close friend Señor Sanchez, patron of one the town's leading fireworks families. We are invited to sit, and tequila cocktails are brought out. Tequila cocktails in terra cotta mugs, filled with booze and fruit and, and, um... ice. Local *hielo*, and plenty of it. *Hielo* rich with microscopic life in suspended animation, just waiting for the Tultepec sun and a warm *gringo* digestive tract to stage its comeback. The mayor himself is filling my glass, now raising his own in a toast. *Salud!*

Captain's Log, supplemental. Forced to choose between offending the host and turning my bowels into a historical re-enactment of the Mexican-American War, I have opted for the latter. May God have mercy on my soul. Proceed!

"I'm sorry, but there's no way I can drink this," Monroe says quietly, adjusting his steel-rimmed glasses and pushing his cocktail my way. Wordlessly, I smile and take it. Defenses are breached, floodgates down. It tastes very, very good. At the bar table, one of the young men mixing drinks makes a wrong move and sends the whole affair crashing to the ground. There is much laughter, a sheepish clean-up, more drinking. These people have clearly been at it all day, and I love them for it.

Above: LA Cacophony Mexico trip point man David Schafer, Robert Burk, John Law, Julia Solis, and Vivian Perry pose with the mayor of Tultepec, Senior Sanchez, and a goat's head, at the Sanchez *familia* festival feast in the Sanchez compound on the outskirts of town. You could count the total number of gringos among the hordes of festival goers on your fingers and toes, and the Cacophony contingent was over half the total.

Appetizers are brought out, followed by bowls of thin soup with the unmistakable wet-dog aroma of goat. Sure enough, the plane-crash corpses of two roasted kids—*cabritos*—are carted past with great fanfare, en route from barbecue pit to chopping block in an old wheelbarrow. *Gringos* are invited to pose with severed goat heads (Hey look—we're the Rolling Stones!), and our womenfolk are invited into the kitchen, that *sanctum sanctorum* of Mexican Sisterhood, to try their hands at shaping *papasas*, stuffed *masa* treats shaped like little baby bundles or papooses. Paizley, no stranger to the kitchen (or to the fine art of diapering) catches on quickly and acquits herself well. Maureen, the only woman in our group traveling solo, is a less deft but more enthusiastic. "Eat these!" she insists for the rest of the afternoon, thrusting plates of *papasas* at unsuspecting *gringos*. "I made them!"

I am invited to sample the local *pulque*, a sour-mash cactus beer, tequila's poor relative. It tastes no worse than some Belgian ales I've had, but not much better. I can say now that I've had it, and I cannot say that I will rush out to have it again. Meanwhile the excellent food keeps coming. *Papasas*, fresh tortillas, molé sauce, salsa, and at last the entrée: big chunks of roasted goat over bowls of saffron rice. The meat is served in the traditional manner, hacked into cubes that give each diner a brief survey of the whole goat: some bone, some meat, a little fat, scarcely any fur at all. It is delicious. The tequila drinks keep coming. Señor Antonio's drunken nephew, whose name is Felipe, graciously allows Melmoth to best him at arm-wrestling, then corners me with a heartfelt, slurring monologue on—I think—NAFTA and our partnership across the border. "USA, cars," he says, gripping my shoulder tightly for balance and gesturing with his terra cotta mug. "Mexico, fireworks. Bicycles." He points to an old two-wheeler with a sudden look of fierce passion. "Mexico," he says intensely. "Mexico!"

I have no idea what he means. His words seem to carry a strong note of national pride. Is he talking about his people's admirable ability to make do with less? To enjoy life at a more leisurely pace? I want to understand him but he is drunk, and I am well on my way. My Spanish is a crude barbarian pidgin, suited only

to the necessities of life like obtaining cocktails and clean towels. His English is worse. We are nodding at each other with earnest intensity, trying like hell to communicate, but it just isn't happening. I hope the rest of NAFTA isn't this fucked up.

After swapping addresses with Señor Sanchez we walk back to the square, where I drag out the Nikon and tripod and try to locate a good piece of real estate from which to photograph *las pirotecnicas*. There isn't one. The rooftop views are all obscured by trees and overhead wires, and at street level it looks like I'll either be behind the crowd or far, far too close. I snag a spot on the sidewalk in front of an ice cream shop, no more than ten feet from the nearest tower.

The fireworks begin a half-hour after sunset. Fuses are lit, and suddenly there's chaos. As each tower's elaborate displays begin to burn, the crowd surges forward, then promptly retreats under a rain of fire. The crews of the adjoining towers climb their structures and shake for all they're worth, trying to slough off the cinders and avoid any premature detonations. There is an enormous amount of burning debris. I scramble around with my camera, trying to calculate manual exposures. Two young boys, ten or eleven years old, wordlessly adopt



Above: The crew reclines atop the great pyramid at Chichen Itza, waiting, perhaps, for the saucer people to return to the site.

up a few new cinder burns in the old flight jacket, but am otherwise protected from harm. Before I know it, I've used up all my film. Now I get to relax and enjoy the show.

These towers are unlike anything I have ever seen. For one, they are enormous. Fifty to sixty-five feet high, built entirely from panels of one-inch lath secured with newspaper twine, guyed by hemp and nylon ropes to cars, trucks, trees and nearby buildings. And yes, people climb them—sometimes two at a time—all the way to the top. After the preliminary pinwheels have spun, each tower displays a unique, animated image in time-phased, multi-colored charges. A butterfly flaps its flaming wings. San Juan de Dios dispenses blessings. A dog morphs



into a goat, and then back again. Each colored charge ends its burn with a dose of pure phosphorous white that burns the design into the back of your eyeballs. And then the UFOs lift off—great horizontal pinwheels, six to ten feet across, that spin up enough rocket power to soar two or three hundred feet straight up, then dispense a load of conventional skyrockets and fall—still flaming—somewhere over the flat-roofed horizon. No one seems to know or care exactly where. The drinking is getting serious. Paizley and I fall in with two young men sharing a bottle of Presidente brandy and a 2-litro of Pepsi. Their uncle, a bull-chested man of fifty with salt-and-pepper hair, gets me into another heartfelt, surreal conversation of the sort

I had earlier with Felipe. He beats his chest with his fist, shakes my hand a hundred times, and offers to kick the entire crowd's ass if anyone gives me trouble. "*Mi casa es su casa,*" the older of his nephews says sincerely. Uncle nods profoundly. To their credit, they look only slightly dazed when I tell them there are thirteen of us traveling together. It takes many gracious apologies to get out of this one. They ask where I am staying, and when they hear the answer they roll their eyes heavenward, as if scanning the skies for lightning. Our hotel, apparently, does not have a good reputation. Only when I insist that we are leaving in the early morning hours for Guanajuato do they seem to relax. I am made to swear oaths I do not fully understand, the gist of which seems to be that if and when I do return, I and all my ancestors and descendants will move in for the full duration of our stay, drink until we can't see, and possibly—I'm not entirely sure on this last point—arrange for the intermarriage of certain grandchildren who will than take over the combined family businesses and support us in our dotage, while we blow off fireworks and forget where we left our hip flasks.

The old man is a *pirotecnico*, and apparently a good one from the way his nephews keep nodding and saying "*Muy respecto*" whenever he brings it up. Or maybe he whips them at night and they're terrified—I have no way of knowing. He keeps showing me the back of his left hand, lightly brushing it with the fingers of his right as he talks about the fireworks trade. Much later it dawns on me that he is showing me his fingers. All ten of them, still attached. Many in the crowd are not so lucky.

Only when it occurs to me to look do I begin to notice the stumps, the gloves, the hands in pockets. Theirs is a good trade, but unforgiving. "*Los pirotecnicos de Tultepec,*" I say, drunk enough now to risk a complete sentence, "*es supremo del mundo.*" I'm sure I'm saying it wrong, but I mean it, and they seem to enjoy hearing it. I say it again, several times. And I do mean it. I mean, if this isn't the best in the world, what is?

By the time the fireworks end, the crowd is getting very drunk. Within fifteen minutes, most of the families have left and it's just men in the square. The testosterone-challenged members of our group have been attracting more than their share of attention all night, but now the advances intensify. Paizley, blonde coif covered by a hooded sweatshirt, has traveled a lot in Mexico; she avoids eye contact, but still picks up a few sniggers from men who spot her water bottle, which bears the logo of our apparently infamous hotel. The other women are not so street-smart. I perform a few missions of mercy, playing the husband and rescuing my fellow travelers from overzealous Romeos. Julia, long blonde hair bare to the world, gets her ass grabbed by a suitor; another local man steps up and punches the offender to his knees.

"I think this is about the time we want to be leaving," Melmoth observes. "I've been to things like this before, and they get can ugly when the entertainment ends." Since he quit drinking, he's become uncommonly prudent. Also a convenient designated driver, though only of last resort. There's a very good reason Melmoth is not allowed to operate motor vehicles in California anymore, and why he's on the shit list of every car rental company on the West Coast. I once saw him ram a rental into an old console television over and over until he got the drive wheels up off the ground and spinning. But I figure under



the circumstances he'll still probably do better than me. After all, he is sober. He is the only one who is sober. He grins. I hand him the keys. "If we get in an accident," he says, "trade seats."

The drive is hair-raising, but Melmoth's natural instinct to operate any machine at its absolute limits are kept in check by the fact that several members of our party are massively *borracho*, and likely to puke at the slightest provocation. No one, not even Melmoth back when he was drinking, wants to drive to Guanajuato in a pukey bus. We return safely to our den of sin.



Above and Facing page: The zenith of the festival for Cacophony was the "local" competition which consisted of dozens of 30-60 foot tall, entirely hand made towers called *castillos*, sporting kinetic incendiary wheels, shooting a non-stop cascade of genuinely dangerous ordnance onto the cheering multitudes below.



*"The Harmonic Convergence is the name given to the world's first globally synchronized meditation, announced by José Argüelles, and which occurred on August 16-17, 1987, and which also closely correlated to an exceptional alignment of planets in our solar system.*

*The timing of the Harmonic Convergence allegedly correlated with the Mayan calendar, with some consideration also given to European and Asian astrological traditions. The chosen dates have the distinction of allegedly marking a planetary alignment with the Sun, Moon and six out of eight planets being "part of the grand trine."*



**The Carmonic Convergence**

The pick-up truck that arrived at the famous San Francisco artists' habitation, The Goodman Building, backed into the parking bay while several of us helped Scott Williams carry his large-sized stencils to the bed of the vehicle. We then headed over to an empty lot at Harrison and Division, under the freeway. It was a Saturday morning and the word had been out for months about the event that was intended to lampoon the all pervasive New Age concept of the Harmonic Convergence: *The Carmonic Convergence*.

Conceived by street artists, the event, held in August of 1987, was intended to create a few laughs and prank the seriousness of the moment. This cosmic planetary alignment was as portentous as the Y2K scare, but of a more positive bent; believers of the Harmonic Convergence prepared for the "new world" that would come forth from the planetary alignment, only this event was to bring about world peace through an astrological confluence.

We were not New Agers. Most of us scoffed at the idea of such a change from planets aligning. If we had self-identified, we would have called ourselves punks or anarchists. But mostly we called ourselves artists.

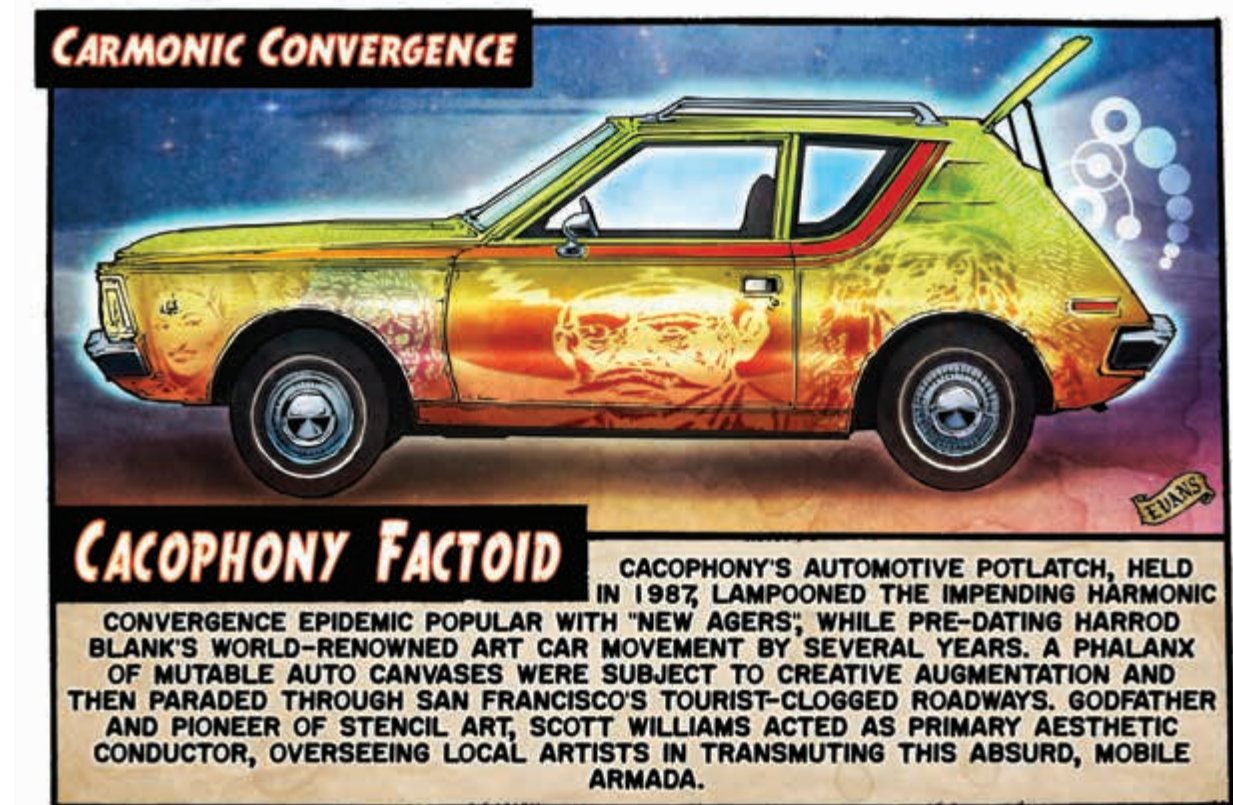
We convened on the desolate parking lot and proceeded to alter our own vehicles, or those of others. Masking tape was in high demand and everyone arrived with a few

cans of spray paint to contribute to the day. The festivities began, stencils were held to cars, some free-style painting commenced, people walked from car to car and offered to help, or just commented on the progress.

Not owning a car at the time, I still attended and participated, helping Miss Lulu create pleasing collages on her driver's door and tailgate. As a friend of Scott's, I held stencils to car sides and looked away and closed my eyes when the wind picked up the spray paint fumes and passed them near my nose. Masks, gloves, and aprons were not even part of our considerations that day.

The sun crested and began its fall, and still we painted. More cars arrived, beers were opened, groups of people moved from car to car to appreciate the labors of the participants. Then an idea sparked: a caravan through San Francisco streets! It was a must as an end to the day! More beers were opened as a parade route was considered. Maximum viewing of the newly decorated cars was of importance in the making of our parade plans. Market Street, obviously, with a turn on Castro or perhaps Van Ness, or both.

We formed a single line, headed out of the parking lot, and proceeded to careen through the streets, enjoying the gaping stares and shouts and hoots from those whom we passed, proud of our newly decorated cars.



Top left: Scott Williams pulls stencils from a truck to use on the cars waiting for painting at the Carmonic Convergence. Top right: One of the decorated cars after painting with stencils from Scott's large pile of possibilities. Bottom: The scene of cars and people creating imaginative images on their cars. Foreground: Miss Lulu works on her Ford Fiesta.

**HOW I MET CACOPHONY, MADE WEIRD CARS, AND HELPED CHANGE HOW AMERICA DRIVES**

Harrod Blank

Back in early '80s, while at Santa Cruz High, I looked normal but I didn't feel normal. I could fit in if I wanted to, but mainstream culture was boring and predictable - and so was my first car - a 1965 white VW bug. I hated TV, so I shot the one I had with a .22 and mounted it on top of the car. I added all sorts of other symbols, poems, flowers, a rooster, and crazy shit one would never put on a car.

In the late '80s, I moved to Berkeley, CA, where I lived in a shack behind my father's house. Because of the art car (which developed into "Oh My God!") I was invited to all sorts of strange parties and events. Gradually I started seeing the same characters, and noting certain trademark quirks, like a guy with glasses wearing a V neck sweater, always carrying a SLR; a guy obsessed with Xmas themed clothes and music; a woman seamstress who always wore an outlandish outfit and who would guffaw upon seeing me and my art car. Since I was an outsider and new to the area, it took me a while until I learned that I was part of the Cacophony Society.

I actually met Michael Mikel, before I knew that he was the one who had the "other" art car that I would see, from time to time, parked outside some of the events. I began inviting Michael and his "5:04 pm" car, created during

the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, to small art car events and parades, along with Ramona Moon and her "Turkey Toyota," Ron Dolce and the "Glass Quilt," Larry Fuente and "Mad Cad", David Best and his art cars, and a handful of other early bay area art car folks.

The fact is that the art car folks and the Cacophony folks sort of gravitated towards one another—and the groups cross pollinated, not mated per se, but a lot of art car people attended Cacophony events and vice versa. It sort of makes sense, looking back on it, as art car people do not take their cars too seriously, and they play with the concept of value— that the car is a loaded symbol to be fucked with; that the car is really a canvas; that an art car is really a prank against the car.

In 1991, both John Law, who I had come to know by seeing him at virtually every event, and Michael Mikel told me that I needed to go to Burning Man, to bring my art car and that I would love it. Well, like with most folks it took two years for me to actually get there. In 1993 I attended, filmed in super 8, and was blown away. In 1994 I started Art Car Camp, invited art car artists from across the country, and I began making what would become a 20 year documentary film project on Burning Man. Each year the number of art cars doubled, to



CACOPHONY FACTOID

THE DOGMINICAN ORDER

THESE CARTOONISH, OVERSIZED DACHSHUNDS ONCE ADORNED BAY AREA FAST FOOD FRANCHISE DOGGIE DINER. DESIGNED BY ARTIST HAROLD BACHMAN, THE ICONIC DOGS ARE AN INESCAPABLE AND, FOR SOME, A CHERISHED MEMORY. ONE REMAINS AND IS NOW A DESIGNATED HISTORICAL LANDMARK AT THE GATES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO ZOO. IN RETIREMENT, THREE OF THE JUBILANT CANINES HAVE ACTED AS PATRON SAINTS FOR THE ANNUAL ST. STUPID'S DAY PARADE AND MYSTERIOUSLY APPEAR AT COUNTLESS QUIRKY EVENTS. THE CLOISTERED ECCLESIASTICAL CURS ARE LOVINGLY STEWARDED BY CACOPHONIST SEBASTIAN MELMOTH.

Facing page: Louise Jarmilowicz, Annie Coulter, M2, and Sarah Rosenbaum prepare to hand out trophies to the art cars that survived the Cacophony Society's 49 Mile Psychotic Road Rally. This event was Cacophony's formal meeting and first joint event with Harrod Blank and the nascent art car culture.

the point where I no longer would see every art car out there. In 2011, there were over 600 art cars and mutant vehicles at Burning Man.

The correlation between the Cacophony Society, Burning Man, and Art Cars is a direct relation from one into the other and back again. In the mid to late '90s, Philo Northrup and I organized the ArtCar Fest. Local artists began to attend Cacophony events; one in particular was the celebration at the Doggie Diner with John Law and the Doggie Diner Dogs.

There have been so many Cacophony events that I've attended, not to mention a Burning Man and ArtCar Fest every year, that perhaps it's hard to see what it all means. All I know is that I've had a hell of a good time and I really do appreciate what everyone brings to the table in this crazy life.

My name is Harrod Blank and I am proud to be a member.



**NIGHT CRAWLER - DOG CRAZE**

Silke Tudor, *SF Weekly*, Wednesday, Nov 17, 1999

Dog Craze: In a rare convergence of nature and desire, the lingering November fog recedes long enough to make brunch near the zoo a seductive, rather than required, engagement; not that rain or fog could forestall today's dining party. One by one— with hangovers, dietary restrictions, and shut-eye deprivation weighing heavily on our jowls— we belly up to the Formica counter of the Carousel restaurant to request chili-cheese burgers and fries at 10:30 in the morning. The gastronomic action is a labor of love, and support, for the cheerful dachshund — the last standing Doggie Diner dog head— that has watched over this neighborhood with benevolent good humor for as long as most of us can remember.

Last month, the smiling hound, with its bow tie and chef's hat—a 10-foot-high, 300-pound testament to an erstwhile 30-restaurant chain— was denied landmark status by the Planning Commission, despite public outcry and more than 7,000 signatures; if an appeal to the Board of Supervisors fares as well, nothing prohibits the property owner from razing the diner and the dog head in favor of a parking lot for the Sloat Garden Center. So, in a display of solidarity, Sebastian Melmoth brought his three, privately kept Doggie Diner dog heads out to Sloat Boulevard on a flatbed truck for a little family reunion.

"The first thing I saw when I stepped off the BART at 24th and Mission in 1976," says Melmoth, proudly ensconced in a brown-and-orange Doggie Diner uniform shirt, "was a Doggie Diner dog head. It was my first impression of the city. I was dumbstruck as to how something like this could exist, but I never thought I'd become a steward for its preservation."

Melmoth's Doggie Diner dog pack was the result of his avocation as a sign maker, and, he laughingly says, heavenly intervention. A fellow tradesman led him to the American Neon Sign Co., which then owned the Doggie Diner contract and several out-of-use heads. He purchased the first dog head for a song, and the second by canceling a debt; the third was a surprise birthday gift from his girlfriend, Vanessa K. Of course, buying them is one thing, owning them another.

Above: Chief Doggie Diner Steward and Deacon Sebastian Melmoth at the Carousel Restaurant, shortly after procuring the third and final Dog Head, completing the Holy Trinity of the Dogminican Order. Bishop Joey of The First Church of the Last Laugh canonized the Trinity, declaring that if all the known twelve (of thirty original restaurant mounted Dog Heads) existing were to somehow come together in the same place, world peace would break out.



"They're big," says Melmoth. "Transporting each dog head is a like a religious ordeal, like crawling through the desert without water. Everything that can go wrong will. I got a flat tire hauling them across the Bay Bridge once and was rescued by a guy who had seen it all."

Most of the year, the dog heads are kenneled up north, but they make frequent sojourns to the city, where they have become closely associated with creative endeavors such as the Art Car West Fest, the Cacophony Society, and the St. Stupid's Day Parade. (The "High Holy Trinity of Dogheads" and the "Dogminican Order" are officially sanctioned by the Bishop Joey and the First Church of the Last Laugh.) During the heads' trek, motorists honk and wave, children point and laugh, and tourists snap pictures. It is the nature of a giant, grinning dog head to cause joy, a welcome attribute in a decade whose principal currency is irony.

"Ad campaigns are very savvy today," says Warren Dotz, co-author of *What a Character! 20th Century American Advertising Icons*. "The Doggie Diner dog head is a very innocent, naive sort of icon, and it is specific to the Bay Area. Different cities have different icons -- Chicago has Superdawg and his wife -- but they all bring to mind a simpler time. Some people show visiting friends the Coit Tower; others bring them here to look at the dog head. ... It's like our Mona Lisa of icon characters."

Out on Sloat Boulevard, there is much horn-honking, hand-waving, and picture-taking— spontaneous displays of joy, mingled with concerned expressions from folks who know the fate of the last standing dog.

"I grew up in this neighborhood," says Brad Kopp, adjusting his cape and reminiscing about childhood trips to Playland at the Beach, a nearby attraction that was home to a number of mechanical marvels before

Above: Art car visionary and filmmaker Harrod Blank leaning next to his first major creation, OH MY GOD! Harrod went on to become the Johnny Appleseed of Art Cars, creating books and movies on the subject featuring minds and hearts behind the steering columns. Harrod and Philo Northrup founded the twenty-year running Art Car Festival. Harrod remains the brightest and most voluble spokesman for this most unique American art form.



its lamentable closing. “Laughing Sal [a disturbing mechanical woman] used to scare the pants off of me, and I know that I am not alone in my terror, but passing the Doggie Diner head on the way home would soothe and comfort me. It made everything OK.”

“Like any piece of artwork, the dog head elicits a response,” says 58-year-old Sharman Lindell, who stopped by on her way home from grocery shopping. “And it’s usually a nice one.”

Of course, what is and what is not art has been argued for centuries, and a consensus is not to be reached between neighborhood resident, author, and pop-culture enthusiast Dominic Priore and landowner/Sloat Garden Center VP Ted Warshauer.

“I have the right to optimize the value of my property,” says Warshauer.

“It’s a vanishing art form,” says Priore.

“Art?” says Warshauer.

“You’re standing in a crowd of artists [who see the dog head as art],” says Priore.

“I guess beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” says Warshauer.

90 Certainly, for thousands of art- and ad-character-collectors across the country, this is true.

“There is no intrinsic value in anything collectible, barring maybe gold and silver, except what it’s worth to another

collector,” points out Jane Husain, schoolteacher and wife of 10 years to graphic artist and avid ad-character collector Masud Husain.

The Husain home, which doubles as Masud’s very successful Studio West Design, opens onto a colorful wall display of ad-character paper masks—fanciful table decorations from food chains like Sambo’s and Pig & Whistle, and promotional handouts for Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* and the Amos ‘n’ Andy radio show. Along the walls, in glass cases and on shelves, is a small portion of the couple’s vast ad-character collection.

“The rest are in three storage containers in the basement,” says Jane, “along with the snow globe collection.” (And the majority of the lawn ornament collection, and the Godzilla collection, and the vintage San Francisco souvenir buildings collection, and the antique aquarium mermaids collection, and the Dare Devil Marvel comics collection -- but that’s another story.)

Still, a kaleidoscopic array of pieces is on display; they are as inexpensive as the cowboy menu-mask from Eaton’s that Jane saved as a child, and as costly as the Mida Watch robot-clock that set Masud back \$2,800. There is a GE Radio bandmaster designed by Maxfield Parrish and an early incarnation of Kermit created by Jim Henson for Wilkin’s Coffee. There is a 3-foot RCA dog in lieu of a real one, and the Reddy Kilowatt man popularized in 1926; there are grinning characters for Florida citrus, Kitty Pan Litter, U.F.O. Japanese noodles, Dunkin’ Donuts, Contact

Above: The Cacophony Van by Rockette Bob, the unofficial leader of the Reno Cacophony Society, featured in the 2002 Art Car Festival.

pain reliever, and Ritalin. There are ad characters from the ‘20s to the ‘70s, made of everything from real nuts and bolts to vinyl, styrofoam, and wood, with varying levels of craftsmanship and attention to detail. Like any fine, large collection, some pieces are interesting, clever, and pleasing to the eye, some are disturbing (“Happy Foot”), some are dismissible (“Burgie Bear”), and some are on loan, for public display (albeit at the San Francisco Airport).

“There is a sense of whimsy with the older ad characters, like the Doggie Diner dog head, that is very, very appealing,” Masud says. “But there is also cultural relevance, and aesthetic relevance. I draw a lot of inspiration for my work from comic books, pop art, and popular culture. People can relate to these things. It strikes a chord with them, and with me.”

As for the Doggie Diner dog head, Masud predicts it will be sold into a private collection.

“I wouldn’t mind having it, but you need a lot of space to display something that size in a way that will promote intelligent discourse. Advertising can be completely overwhelming—it’s meant to be. How it’s shown certainly affects how it’s seen.”

Andy Warhol put Campbell’s soup cans in museums and Keith Haring turned his art into T-shirt marketing; as pressure increases it is as likely Warshauer will donate the dog head to a museum as sell it to a private collector. But given the choice between seeing a Haring on the underside of a bridge and a Haring behind glass ...

“I’d rather see the dog head restored,” says Jane, “overlooking the zoo where it belongs.”



Above: Harrod Blank riding atop his Pico De Gallo, an interactive music mobile that pays tribute to the Mexican Mariachi. Pictured in the How Berkeley Can You Be? Parade, which was part of the Art Car Festival, 2002.



**The Last Private Vehicle on the Embarcadero Freeway**

Fifteen clowns arched their backs and leaned into the concrete roadway partition moving it ever so slightly, moving it just enough for a standard early '80s two-door sedan to squeeze through, without scraping off any of the fresh new coat of stock Oldsmobile Dark Green Met paint that M2 had applied, shortly after acquiring the car. The 5:04 pm Special was smacked by a brick wall that fell two stories on 5:04 pm on October 17th, 1989, during the Loma Prieta earthquake. It looked like a meteor hit it; the car was a late model, and a runner, so after a little mechanical work and the \$89.99 Earl Scheib paint job, it was on the road almost constantly, driven by M2, Kevin Evans, Sebastian Hyde, and other Cacophonists. Soon the car was the best-known sedan in San Francisco and was fondly (or annoyingly) referred to as the earthquake car by folks all around the bay.

The 5:04 pm and the closed and seemingly abandoned Embarcadero Freeway were kindred icons in that they were both results of the earthquake.

The Embarcadero Freeway was a massive double deck freeway built in the go-go 1950s, branching off the SF Bay Bridge abutments and running along the main San Francisco waterfront past the iconic Ferry Building, terminating two miles north at San Francisco's bawdy boulevard: Broadway. The Embarcadero was decried for its ponderous and gray eminence by anti-urbanists, tree huggers, city planners, and just about anyone else (except for Chinatown and North Beach merchants, who loved it for bringing customers directly and quickly to their shops). The freeway was originally intended to run along the City's entire north/north eastern waterfront,

eventually linking the Bay Bridge with its more prominent sister, the Golden Gate. This scheme was derailed by citizen outcry not too long after the completion of the first Embarcadero section; the old workhorse thoroughfare was red tagged, closed to traffic, and basically abandoned after the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

This colossal abandoned structure became a playground for Cacophony for two years prior to the State of California razing it in 1991.

Dozens of costumed picnics and midnight walks were staged on both the top and bottom decks. Once, during the 1st Iraqi War in 1991, twenty or so formally dressed Cacophonists were roller skating a bit too close to the bridge approach on the upper deck of the freeway. Recently, several thousand protesters had shut down the bridge, and the authorities were worried about repeat attempts. The CHP assumed that these well dressed, martini swilling skaters were a protest group and, with a wall of slowly moving highway patrol cars, swept them off the structure.

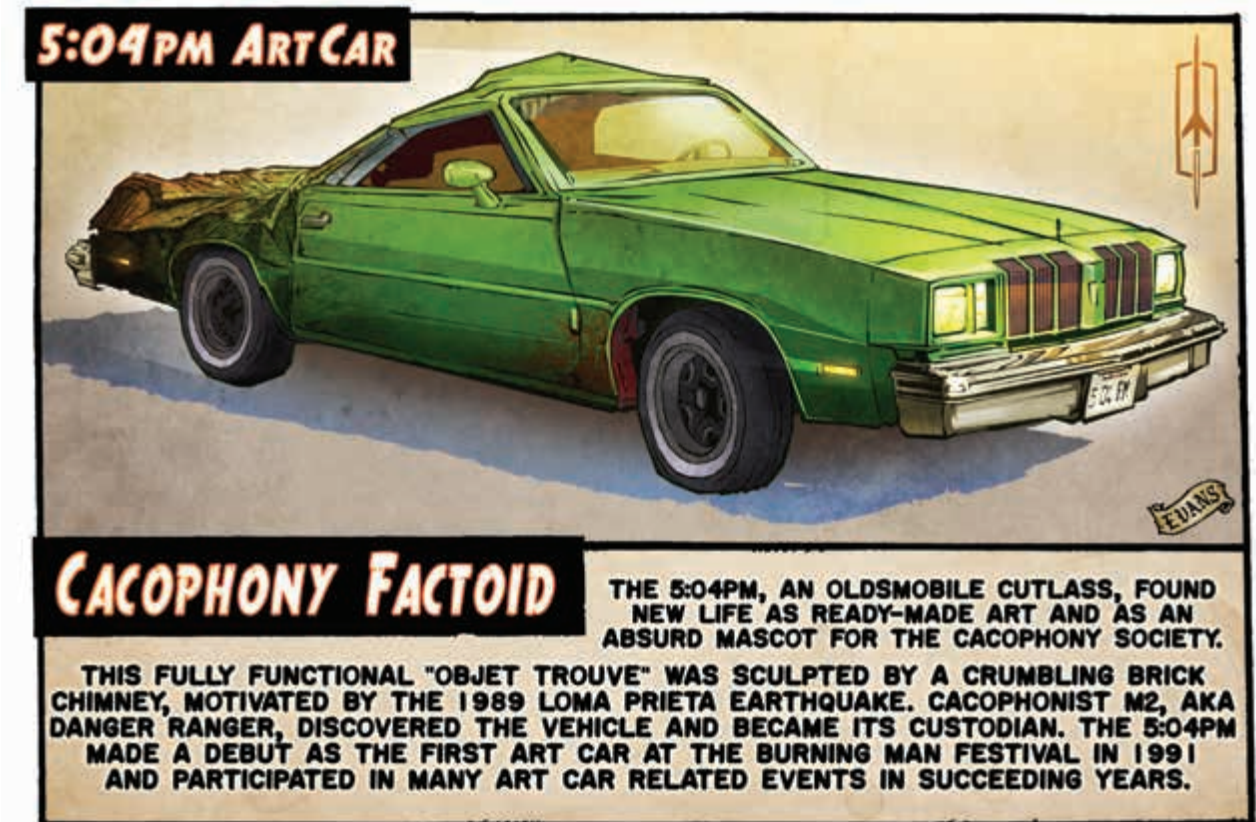
The word was out. It was only a short time 'til the freeway was to be torn down. Lawrence Ferlinghetti had quipped recently that maybe the City should make the old structure into an official City Park and hanging garden trail for hikers and bikers. After all, both decks had some of the best views of both the bay and the city skyline. As

usual, Cacophony was ahead of the Beats on the issue; we had been using the structure since it condemned.

Alas, Ferlinghetti's solution was not to be implemented. The Embarcadero Freeway, which had provided such a marvelous playground for Cacophony, was indeed to be torn down. But not before one last grand gesture.

There hadn't been a private vehicle on the freeway in nearly two years, when Cacophony gathered at the Washington Street off-ramp from the top deck. M2 arrived right on time at 5:04 pm and sped through the concrete barricades, past the cheering clowns, and up onto the freeway. By dumb luck, a SFPD motorcycle cop spotted the hurtling sedan from a block over on Jackson Street and jumped into hot pursuit. From the ground, you could see the arc of the freeway for almost a mile as it curved along the Embarcadero.

A second motorcycle cop had jumped on the freeway at the Broadway ramp and sped along not far behind his fellow, trailing less than a half mile behind the virtually flying 5:04. M2 dropped off the freeway at the Folsom St. ramp, just shy of the Bay Bridge, hung a hard left burning rubber, back and under the ramp. The cops, just far enough behind to not see which turn he took, shot off in the wrong direction. Drinks and back slapping transpired, not long after, at the Edinburgh Castle Pub.



Above: M2 and his fine ride and official Cacophonmobile: The 504 Special. The 504 was the first Art Car to attend Burning Man when Kevin Evans, Sebastian Hyde, Nell Friedman, and Teresa Dinaberg drove the screaming Olds out to the Playa in 1991.



## The Cacophony Pandemic

“It’s a social group for the antisocial: those who prefer to think of themselves as outcasts.” —Jac Zinder

*By 10:30 one night, around a dozen Cacophonists had slipped into the toy store, managing to place several innocuous-looking teddy bears on the shelves, without arousing suspicion. Not content to just leave them there, they appointed Cacophonist Todd to help direct the management’s attention to the prank. At 10:35, Todd entered, located a concrete-filled “Cuddler,” and brought it to the register, informing the cashier he couldn’t find the price. Predictably, as he placed the innocent looking toy in those unwary hands, it went crashing to the floor like a particularly heavy bowling ball.*

*After this, it just got worse. Todd began to demand a speedier price check, insisting that he had only minutes to complete this transaction, before it would be too late to bring the bear to his nephew, who was, as he repeated many times for everyone’s benefit, “in the hospital with a skin rash.” This element of his story, however, did not appear to provoke the suspicion of the clerk, who apparently had no difficulty imagining her customer entering the children’s ward not long before 11 pm to dump a lump of fur-covered construction material in the lap of an ailing youngster.*

*—Rev Al on placing Cement Cuddlers (teddy bears filled with concrete) in a Toys’R’Us store*

The first Cacophony frontier outpost took root in the verdant soil of a place well known for its weirdness and dysfunction: Los Angeles, California. Beneath the filmy surface image of LA, a world well known for self-absorbed wallowers in a shallow pool of grim social climbing and self-promotion, there exists a layer of people attuned to a different level of the odd. These people, whether born Angelenos or transplants, tend to work in the support economy that exists to service the film, fashion, and music industries. Creative, off color, and loaded with bad attitude from observing the goings on in the surreal worlds around them, they proved to be, perhaps, the most natural recruiting group for Cacophony.

M2, on an extended business trip installing video systems for Cal Trans, found himself alone and bored during his

off work hours in a strange town with no friends about to play with. He printed up flyers and with missionary zeal, delivered them to coffee houses, theaters, libraries, bars, and any other places he figured fun weirdoes might congregate.

The first respondent, Alan Ridenour, soon became Rev Al, and LA Cacophony was up and running, eventually

### Crayons for Jesus! A Cacophonist Coloring Book by Rev. Al



Facing page: On the heels of the success of LA Cacophony, groups in other cities began to sprout. SF Cacophony members, accompanied by “Baby Jesus,” organized a Zone Trip to Seattle to help kick off that town’s Cacophony Lodge. A blessing of the Fremont Street Bridge Troll was the first order of business. The Baby Jesus was handed off from one group to the next over the years, presumably finding its way back to its original Midwestern Nativity Scene.

Above: LA Cacophony primarily attracted artists, writers, and performers, which resulted in projects like this coloring book composed by LA Cacophony founding member Reverend Al Ridenour.





perpetrating what surely were the most cutting and sardonic Cacophony pranks to ever be foisted on an unknowing, and, some would say, undeserving public. Rev Al's ironically spiritual fervor and visionary wit soon attracted a plenum of pranksters and out patients, ready to wreak havoc on the citizens of Los Angeles. The rest of their story deserves its own book.

Not long after, Melmoth, M2, J.D. Boggmann, Vivian Perry, Sebastian Hyde, and others went north to help inaugurate both the Seattle and Portland Cacophony Societies. Yahooon Doorstop, recently transplanted from San Francisco, eventually connected with former Suicide Club stalwart Bob Campbell and others to kick off the Seattle chapter. This congregation leaned toward hosting costumed balls, elaborate soirees, and live action games taking place in peculiar and often off limits locations.

Portland Cacophony officially began with a spectacular Atomic Cafe event in a giant abandoned Greyhound bus hangar. Attendees from San Francisco joined the neophyte Portlanders at co-organizer Jim Skinner's beautifully decaying Edwardian house near the equally decrepit event location. Skinner, an artist driven in part by his Viet Nam experiences, had recently received death threats because of the gigantic, completely naked Rasta Black Jesus, sporting a humungous erection, which was nailed to an equally massive cross planted on his front lawn. This singular display was unavoidable to the gaze of anyone passing by his house on the adjoining, heavily traveled freeway.

Skinner and former Suicide Club member and Mt. St Helens volcanic eruption survivor, Robert Rogers, brought the Cacophony virus home to Portland, after attending

the first two Burning Man outings onto the Black Rock Desert in 1990 and '91. This fresh infection congealed nicely with the nascent Portland Beater Art Car Club, and with the shepherding of Art Car artist Rev. Chuck Linville, Kathy Fors, Victor Hunstra, and others, provided the impetus for a uniquely northwestern eruption.

One memorable Portland outing involved sneaking into the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant for a "Nuclear Family Picnic." Stuffed animals were shot out of a one-foot diameter mortar to kick off this event.

Well armed SF transplant William Abernathy and mysterious LA Cacophony urban explorer Julia Solis connected with Caution Mike Connors, sexologist and Circus Redickulous

alumni Ducky Dolittle and the lovable Chris Hackett to bring Cacophony to New York. Social networking pioneer Jeff Stark, inspired by Laughing Squid, came a bit later founding New York's post Cacophony online events list: Nonsense NY. Brooklyn Cacophony blazed brightly and briefly, fracturing within a year into different organizations, including the Brooklyn art collective, The Madagascar Institute and the seminal underground exploration cabal, Dark Passage.

Detroit Cacophony, pioneered by Dennis Borawski, Carl Heiney, Harry Haller, and others, provided perhaps the most weapon happy outpost for Cacophony. Borawski's flaming propane tank shooting events, copied by a generation of early Burning Man marksmen, were pioneered in huge abandoned industrial edifices scattered about the darkly decaying landscape of America's seized engine of a city. Climbing the massive span of Ambassador Bridge, an actual international crossing, was a regular endeavor of the Detroit crew.

Cacophony played out across the country more as an idea or philosophy than as an actual organization. The founding precepts of Burning Man, as well as the ethics and techniques for the worlds of Urban Exploration and "Culture Jamming," were filtered through the porous prophylactic of Cacophony. By the turn of the millennium, there were outposts in dozens of cities world wide, including Edinburgh, Scotland, Atlanta, GA, Chicago, Tokyo, and McMurdo Station, Antarctica. Some of these outposts were full-fledged "lodges," filled with dozens of trouble makers, others simply small clots of clever malcontents with Internet access.



Above: Rev Al's predilection for Christian Iconography infused many LA Cacophony projects with "spiritual" symbolism and, in some instances, blatant religious mimicking.

**CACOPHONY IS AS CACOPHONY DOES**

Reverend Al

There are no rules as to how you should proceed. Cacophony grows organically, nurtured by example. The various lodges are different, but bear a family resemblance to one another. Like families, they may squabble, envy, backstab, and inspire. If you're getting out of line, your family will let you know. If you don't like it, you can always run away with the name.

The only contentious areas have generally been implicit political agendas (generally frowned upon, whether anarchist, libertarian, or worse) and "commercial" events (a vague concept — get reimbursed for services, materials, and rentals necessary to some events).

If you get different information from all of us, it's to be expected. It is Cacophony, after all. Every branch has its own legitimate way of running things. The fact that we've survived for a few years is the only justification we have for our approach.

**You May Already Be A Member**

We assume you're already some sort of bona fide eccentric or you wouldn't be interested in Cacophony at all. Our tagline, "You may already be a member!" says a lot about how we operate. In a sense, we never create anything new at all. We never claim to come into a town

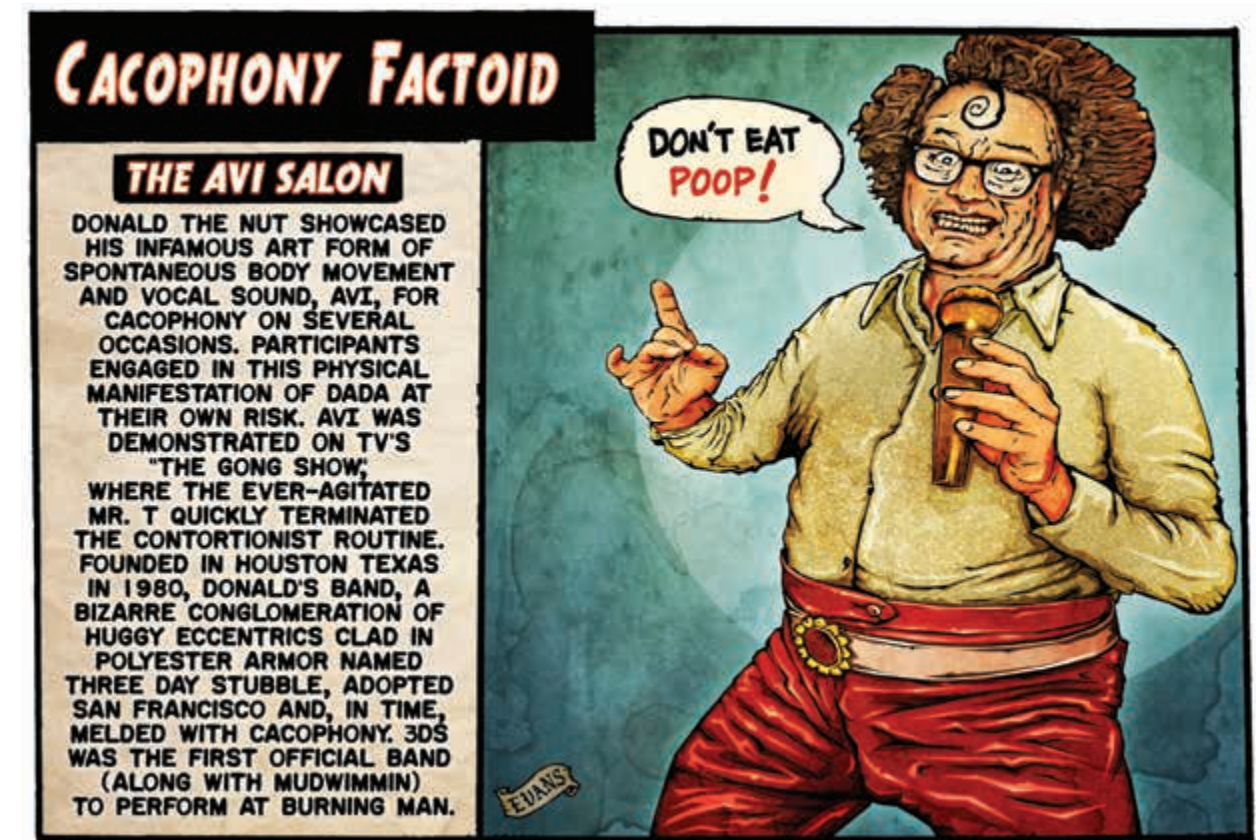
and teach people how to be amusingly subversive. They're already doing it! We just raise the bogus flag, and see who will gather under the flagpole for further mischief.

Obviously there are a lot of creative malcontents out there doing the stuff they like to do, whether or not they've ever heard of our society. We assume you're one of those. If you are, we're lucky. If you have a few like-minded friends, we're even luckier. And if you have some sort of near-evangelical fervor to spread the word, a lot of free time, maybe a bit of money, then you help yet one more city combust and cave in.

**It All Begins With Lies**

For me, Cacophony began as a hoax! When I first found out about it, through a flyer in a local coffeehouse, I was puzzled by the text that implied that the society had existed in Los Angeles for years and wondered where this mysterious body of subversives resided. After a few weeks trying to get ahold of the perpetrators (who actually resided in San Francisco), I discovered that if I wanted to find Cacophony in Los Angeles, I would have to set about creating it.

Though this was the beginning of Cacophony in the city of Los Angeles, Cacophony begins by the same process





in everyone's life by throwing themselves wholeheartedly into something impossibly absurd, an organization based upon chaos.

Cacophony is very nebulous, very loosely defined. Membership is unconscious. ("YOU MAY ALREADY BE A MEMBER!") By maintaining this fluidity, we have been able to slip out of some problematic situations, make entertainingly hyperbolic claims, and disavow responsibility for specific naughty acts.

You'll also need to lie. Especially lie to the media. They'll be grateful for the more colorful copy. Yes, yes, yes, we all know the media "co-opts" underground culture, but that's hardly a reason to shun it. Make the media your play partner. Chances are your "underground" interests were at some point nurtured by one of those media mongers, who makes a living by spilling the underground beans. It would be uncharitable to keep the fun of Cacophony to yourself once you're "inside." Share with the media, lie, contribute your myth-making skills to our culture.

Media particularly likes to regurgitate itself. You can feed them bits of press from our site here.

### Organizing Chaos

The thing that establishes a society is regular events, and a flyer that can be counted on to come out around the first of every month. People need to see Cacophony as being somewhat stable to be attracted to it to a degree where they're willing to assume some responsibility. It seems to me that when people try and start fraternal lodges in their cities, they take on too much responsibility, coordinating several events a month, and burn out. One event and one flyer every month is not an unreasonable

demand on any one person and it gives a lodge some credibility; if like minded others want to host events too, then that's just fine.

I think every town needs a lynch pin to make sure that something, however meager, happens every month and that people see the flyers. Creativity isn't too much of a burden, why not just borrow ideas from other cities? The real effort comes in at the very beginning, taking the initiative to fill a leadership role in the society. And remember, we do it because it's fun.

### The Cabal and The Crowd: A Historical Precedent

Have you ever glanced upon a fleet of miniature cars driven by fez-wearing Shriners and wondered how a centuries-old brotherhood could sustain itself on such frivolous antics? Why, the very idea is preposterous! Obviously, these antics are merely a ruse, camouflaging more sinister and entertaining lodge activities, including ritualized re-enactments of ancient sacrificial rites and nude demonic sex rituals.

Allow me to explain.

Freemasonry, like Cacophony (or any secret society worthy of the name), is structured to allow for many levels of initiation. Many of those "members" who believe they are already insiders are in fact little more than a blissfully ignorant buffer between a small but powerful cabal and the world it successfully manipulates.

Cacophony knows a good plan when it sees one.

Many of those who occasionally attend a large-scale event hosted by the society will add a little bohemian derring-do to their reputation by boasting to their friends of their close association with the society. They may even stay in touch with our activities through postal and e-mail updates. But their role remains that of spectators, not participants.

What many active participants in our society do not know is that there is a vast silent majority claiming allegiance to the principles of Cacophony. Currently there are more than 1000 subscribers on our mailing lists. A minority of 100 or so of these are subscribed to our Discussion List, the online entity intended to function as the society's guiding body. The rest are passive recipients of one-way mailings announcing activities. An even smaller fraction of these subscribers actually trouble themselves to attend our monthly planning meetings downtown.

### Experiences Beyond The Mainstream What Kind of Events?

"Experiences beyond the mainstream" is the phrase that was first used by San Francisco Cacophony and remains a watchword for other lodges. In Los Angeles, at least,

Lodged between a tarot reader and a quick-sketch artist on Venice Beach one Sunday were some odd fellows with a sign that said: "Free Casts—Arms or Legs." "Feigning injury is in," they insisted, urging passers-by to plaster up and concoct heroic stories about their bad breaks. These are the same folks who infiltrated a recent UFO conference at the LAX Hilton, handing out leaflets from the so-called Brotherhood

Cacophony's spiritual leader, Alan Reidenour, a computer animator who goes by the nom de guerre of Reverend Al. "We want to offer people an alternative to going to clubs, movies or generally spending a lot of money."

Reidenour launched the L.A. Cacophony Society last April when its San Francisco counterpart group was looking to expand. Besides throwing fracture parties and creating close



Photograph: Dale Berman

of Magnetic Light that spoke of the discovery of the Magnetic Christ, a sacred icon that would attract UFOs to Vista Del Mar Park on a certain evening. On that evening, following an elaborate ritual, a huge glowing something-or-other did waft over the beach before bursting into flames.

"Candid Camera"? Nope, Cacophony. The Los Angeles Cacophony Society is a group of self-described "spelunkers of the unconscious" who prowl the urban landscape hellbent on sabotaging the mundane. "We want to turn the city into a playground," says

encounters of a dubious kind, cacophonists host poetry readings in odd venues and arrange offbeat field trips to such exotic locales as Grandma Prisky's Bottle Village in Simi Valley and the giant head of Elvis near Joshua Tree National Park. The group also publishes the Zone, a monthly newsletter that advertises Cacophony events and serves as a clearinghouse for local weirdness. And anyone can host any kind of event as long as it isn't religious, political, profit-making or dangerous. "The goal," Reidenour says, "is chaos—and fun." —Mark Ehrman



LONGING FOR INTRIGUING, OBSCURE EVENTS TO ATTEND IN LOS ANGELES? WELL, YOUR SAVIORS MAY HAVE ARRIVED. THE LOS ANGELES CACOPHONY SOCIETY DESCRIBES ITSELF AS "...A RANDOMLY GATHERED NETWORK OF FREE SPIRITS UNITED IN THE PURSUIT OF EXPERIENCES BEYOND THE PALE OF MAINSTREAM SOCIETY... THE DEAD AND RESURRECTED MERRY PRANKSTERS, WILY CHILDREN, PYROTECHNICIANS, URBAN EXPLORERS, DADAIST BOXERS, FARSIGHTED BARBERS, NEARSIGHTED BUTCHERS, THE SABOTEURS OF THE MUNDANE..." AND CONTEND THAT "YOU MAY ALREADY BE A MEMBER" — ISN'T THAT NICE. JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING, THEY ARE THE ONES WHO PUT TOGETHER THE MASS TRANSIT AND LAUNDROMAT POETRY READINGS, THE CARAVANS TO URANUS, AND EVEN THE VENICE BEACH FRACTURE PARTY, WHERE ATTENDEES HAVE CASTS APPLIED TO THEIR BODIES AND THEN STUN TOURISTS AT VENICE BEACH BY PLAYING VOLLEYBALL, BUILDING HUMAN PYRAMIDS AND WEIGHT-LIFTING TOGETHER WHILE SHARING SELF-AGGRANDIZING LIES ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF THEIR INJURIES. TO ADD TO THE FUN, ALMOST ALL OF THESE EVENTS ARE FREE.

**The Cacophony Society** is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society.

We are playful adults and wily children, pranksters, poets, artists, creative malcontents, inspired visionaries, cultural cliff dwellers, stray sparks, loose cannons on the ship of fools, psychological hitmen, cabalistic lowriders, the bad egg at the corporate picnic, technologically advanced cave painters, spontaneously combusting file clerks and eccentric individualists. Each month we get together to subvert old realities and create new ones. Our newsletter of scheduled events may include: dancing on rooftops, holding poetry readings in laundromats, playing games of hide & seek or capture-the-flag in crowded department stores and empty parks, Alice-in-Wonderland costume picnics, performing stage plays in abandoned buildings, conducting suicide notewriting workshops or walking through the sewers in formal dress. We are collectors of obscure movies, lost records and tapes, social dodo, mental junk, unusual quirks, funny notions and personal experiences.

**You may already be a member!** LOS ANGELES: (213) SAN FRANCISCO: (415)



we use it to describe any of four types of events. They're describe below not so much in terms of specific content, but how you might use these events to get more people involved into the collective effort.

#### Shows, Fundraisers, or Themed Parties

Thanks to pervasive media coaxing, most ambulatory humans at some point feel the need to sample "alternative" or "underground" culture. Most often this need is met by witnessing some form or other of musical performance understood to be edgy. Cacophony events of this category usually incorporate some such performance, but attempt to make some sort of extra push toward absurdity or provocation. These events, whether held in clubs, art spaces, or private homes, usually make some attempt to involve the audience interactively, but also leave room for socializing and shadows for skittish wallflowers. Frequently they may include what passes for "performance art." If you're doing things correctly, attendees at a Cacophony show will arrive eager and fearfully anticipating mess, smoke, and riotous acting out behavior. These events will come close to fitting normal music/art categories of "alternative" entertainment weeklies, and will therefore draw larger numbers of witnesses. A sign-up for a mailing list at the door is imperative to the society's growth. In Los Angeles, we set a cover charge to pay for rental of sound/light equipment, props, space, and to pay performers. If there are leftover funds, the individuals producing the event may keep some for their troubles, but also donate money toward future events of this type.

#### Field Trips to the Fringe

Visits to weird and fringy sites around your area. These are the most well-attended events. They are also the easiest to host, since they don't require any organization more than a couple of phone calls to the site for hours and directions. A good book (easily available, though far from comprehensive) which lists odd sites is *Roadside America*.

#### Workshops

More participatory, but still relaxed social atmosphere. Participants may create art to be used or distributed during the course of another event. In LA, they've created mail art to send, gifts for our rowdy Santas to distribute, cement filled teddy bears for pranks, props for Halloween events, costumes or vehicles for impromptu parades, or cookies baked for Jack Kevorkian.

## 102 Guerrilla Theater & Public Spectacles

These events are usually small because they require a lot of nerve. They usually involve costumes. Include facetious protest marches, human entrants attempting to enter dog shows costumed as dogs, or clowns making their way into an office building, pretending to

look for their party gig. These are the events the media likes covering. Whether or not they draw attendees, the events raise the general level of awareness and interest in what we're doing.

#### Pranks, Hoaxes, Culture Jamming

The creation and deployment of outrageous, unsettling material. False flyers and tracts, billboard alterations, toasters glued to walls, bodies outlined in chalk on sidewalks, placement on shelves of bogus products ("cement cuddlers"), and booths offering services such as free casts for unbroken arms, involve more work than the costumed street theater, because slick presentations are needed to really deceive the public. Lots of talk generally about these more difficult events; follow through harder. Often carried out in solitude or quick nocturnal hits. Fear factor, plus laborious preparation, makes these the hardest events to pull off, those restricted to the dedicated few.

#### Where Do Events Come From?

In LA, we've had a core group of around 10 people who tend to take turns hosting events, which works out pretty well. Because I like to encourage new people to host events, I always back-burner my own ideas when someone new proposes something. If there's a slow month, I pull up one of these ideas, or sometimes there is popular demand for an encore of a past event, which also eases the creative strain during lulls. Also, you should be stealing event ideas from successful lodges within the society.

#### Uh, What Does It Mean To Host An Event?

At some point after attending a few events, maybe years into the fun, someone may decide they actually want to feed the monster further. They want to "host an event." Tell them this:

Minimal requirements:

You show up for the event. You plan the event specifics (date, time, meeting place). You provide your phone number and/or e-mail as a contact for people with questions. You herd the group however necessary when the event begins. (This may simply amount to counting heads, determining when everyone who RSVP'd has arrived, and then announcing the plans to the assembled participants.)

Even better:

You write up the event description (or provide a rough outline, depending on your writing aptitude). You invite your friends to the event, or at least talk it up on the discussion list. (Don't expect a big turnout if you yourself don't invite anyone, if you yourself didn't encourage people both online and in person.) You solicit the help you need OR do all the preparations yourself (finding, making props, scheduling tours, calling for business hours, etc.).

#### Getting Along with the Other Weeds in the Sidewalk

We're all there to crack the cement. And you're probably all growing from the same soil. Here's how Los Angeles grew.

At first, our calendar of events was mainly a bulletin board for events planned not so much as "Cacophony events" but "outside events" and drawing participants from within Cacophony. In any community, you'll find a lot of like-minded people eager to share their talents in this way. Usually these people are marginal artists, zine-makers, or performers of one sort or another. They were doing their thing before the society came along, but tend to be drawn to it as a venue and tend to suggest events that feature their particular work or interests. Occasionally it can be touchy about "ownership" of events they produced when presenting them as "Cacophony events." Clear language in flyers and announcements usually circumvents this problem, however. LA & SF Cacophony have used a "Sounds Like Cacophony" category in their newsletters to preserve distinctions while affirming bonds.

#### Starting with a Bang or a Whimper?

In general there are two ways to get things going; the first is by generating a notoriety with some large-scale event, like Portland did. This takes a lot of time to prepare and a lot of contacts.

The other way to go is the small scale word-of-mouth route. This is less showy and more like starting a social club for freaks, where people come to events not because of some grand theatrics, but because they like the people they've met. For this sort of thing to work, you have to have frequent gatherings to keep the people in touch, and you may have to accept some event ideas that don't quite live up to any provocative ideals. But if you can get a core of people together, you can fine-tune the aesthetic later.

#### When Zines Ruled The Earth: The Hard Way

In November of 1999, LA Cacophony published the last issue of its hard copy newsletter, *Tales from the Zone*. We found online distribution to be much more effective for the reasons detailed below. It was a good thing to get in the mail. Fun to read and to look at, like a zine. But after phasing it out, we've noticed no drop-off in event quality or attendance, and that's what counts.



Above: Brain-eating revenant Walt Lutz mingles with police as Cacophonist zombies show their love for their favorite sanguinary snack and/or environmentalist at the 2000 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. This event is perhaps less noteworthy for its simpleminded punning than for its anticipation of the popular "zombie walks" of the coming decade.

One of the disadvantages of hard copy is cost; with around 250 subscribers, paper and copying costs around \$60 a month, and postage; \$110-120 a month. There was also a lot of work involved in laying out and finding or creating graphics. With a mailing list of any appreciable size, you need to have software and person dedicated to the task of maintaining it: entering new names as they come in over the phone or from sign-up sheets, and dispatching first-time samples and renewal notices when appropriate.

At the height of things, we made 700 copies per month, around 250 of these went into the mail, the rest were dropped at different locations around town, just to get the word out. In the beginning, just to get some action going, we mailed flyers to any potential Cacophonist whose name and address we could extract. Gradually, we gained a little notoriety and confidence and could afford to purge the freeloaders, but we still were sending out freebies to first-timers asking for a sample, or to people to whom we were returning various favors.

#### The Postman & The Armchair Cacophonist

A few years ago, we introduced two different rates of postal subscription: regular (\$10 yearly) and fanatics (\$15). In keeping with SF tradition, we'd always included little enclosures with our mailings (found objects, prank flyers, temporary tattoos, etc.), but the fanatics got a higher quality and quantity of these mail art additions. Near the end of postal subscription, we found that roughly 80% of our subscribers were fanatics. It seemed that since the majority of these people were enjoying Cacophony strictly as a postal phenomenon, they'd decided they'd might as well make it a more worthwhile postal phenomenon and kicked in for the extras.

There is a curious, almost inverse relationship between attendance and paid subscriptions. Those who are generally out and about doing events seem almost less concerned with maintaining contact as “official members.” Those who keep sending in money year after year tend to be in more outlying neighborhoods or cities and seem to be content with vicarious “membership.” It’s almost as if the concept of membership were antithetical to the Cacophony ideal (or maybe that’s just what I want to see).

The writing in the calendar, whether online or on paper, has always been important. I think it’s vital to have a good writer fanning the flame when it’s raging and to keep the embers glowing while Cacophony is not so active. Cacophony can sustain itself for quite a while in a zine-like dormancy—good newsletters (whether there’s news or not) keep the armchair Cacophonist at the ready, as does online discussion. When a real-world event actually pulls itself together, they’ll be prepared to plunge in.

#### All Online From Here! You’re Soaking In It

You’re enjoying the advantages of online propagation right now naturally. And it’s only right. As a fringy endeavor, Cacophony now, naturally inclines toward any means (legal or otherwise) of eliminating the expenses of print production. The Internet not only allows this, but it has also encouraged more spontaneity in planning, by accommodating the ever present need for last-minute updates on meeting times and places—advantages not possible when the calendar was printed and mailed a month in advance. Online publication also encourages potential participants by providing more information via event photographs, interactive maps, and links to additional online information about field trip destinations, targets for pranks, or artists participating in shows.

#### E-mail Community

We also have two types of email lists: REGULAR (a one-way list), which is used to announce each event several days before it happens, with copy lifted from the newsletter, and DISCUSSION, which is used to interactively plan events, brainstorm, chat, build up community, etc.. I’ve found the discussion list very, very helpful in generating more participation. Within the last few months in particular, most of the events have arisen from this list.

I was very hesitant originally about e-mail, thinking that it was for a bunch of stay-at-homes who’d rather air opinions than do events, and while there is this aspect, it’s proven to be quite a good thing. A couple of years ago, I was opposed to dispersing information over the Net, thinking it was still too elitist, but today, particularly with employer-provided accounts, I think it’s universal enough.

Besides merely posting the information on the Web, and sending e-mail event announcements, Cacophony has created an interactive online community dedicated to collective brainstorming, sharing news of about-town oddities and activities, as well as discussing other esoteric and subversive topics of common interest. These days it’s fairly common at Cacophony events to hear isolated loners emerge from the woodwork with the mention of an online identity or mail alias: “Yes, that’s me: Isolated@loner.net!” Many fast friendships and hush-hush allegiances can be traced to the recent birth of this online discussion list.

#### Culling the Online Herd

Of course there are problems with any system. Nasty, irritating discussion list parasites crop up. Here are our rules for subscription to the discussion list:

- 1) Posts should have something to do with events.
- 2) Never send pictures to the list.
- 3) Don’t reply to all when an individual response will do. The default setting sends mail to the entire group. There are 200 or so people on this list. Do they all need to hear your response? If not, please copy and paste the INDIVIDUAL sender’s name in over the “To” field.
- 4) No one liners. Examples: No “Hear! Hear!” No “I agree.” No “I’d be into doing this event.” A good use of this list is as a sounding board and informal survey, but when someone asks: “Is anyone interested?” please email your “count me in” to the INDIVIDUAL. Some of you have been doing this already. Thanks, Peter. It also helps when you include a reminder in the body of your mail like “If interested, please mail me back at pissy@toomuchmail.com.”
- 5) No suggestions for events other people should do. Brainstorming is fine, and I know it’s not always possible to pull the best stunts off, but as a rule of thumb, make it something you would be willing to do.

#### Virtually Nothing

You can’t really tell who’s full of hot air online. This calls for a meeting. Face to face. We’ve found that actual monthly meetings in the real world help determine who’s just an online know-it-all and who’s ready to roll up their sleeves and do something. If they never make it to an actual meeting to discuss the ideas they’ve been going on about, it’s clear that they won’t make those ideas happen. Then we know to just politely ignore them when they beat their chests online. Meetings are fairly loose, but we do go down an agenda, basically reviewing past events one by one, discussing ideas for the coming month bandied about online, and then opening the floor to whatever new ideas there might be.

#### Online Brainpool

I made it my job to go back each month and print out notes for the meeting consisting of ideas suggested that month by the online discussion. I’d call people’s bluffs and see if they’d squirm out or move forward with the idea. Naturally, in a tolerably short meeting, all details, even the date of the event itself, don’t get resolved. All the follow-up used to get hashed out (inevitably at the last minute) via phone tag.

#### Webpages

Make no mistake; the Internet encourages anonymity, lurking, and vicarious living. The curious will want to learn about your lodge without having to commit any personal information (such as their Hotmail address). For all they know, we might be certified lunatics with stalker tendencies, or worse, marketers. While it might not be essential for a small, familial lodge, consider building at least the simplest of websites. Many ISPs provide free space for their customers. And we’ll link off the national site, so new members can find you.

Visiting the other lodge websites, you’ll find various approaches. Your webpage should at the very least have contact information, so new members can find someone willing to tell them where the next event or meeting is. Next, it might contain info on upcoming events or even

descriptions of completed ones. Eventually, you can add images, philosophy, links and whatever your little heart desires.

#### Finally

This advice is the culmination of the trials and tribulations of the LA chapter. Referring to them and other lodges, as your chapter grows, will spare you a lot of the headaches the other lodges had to endure. Good luck, agents.

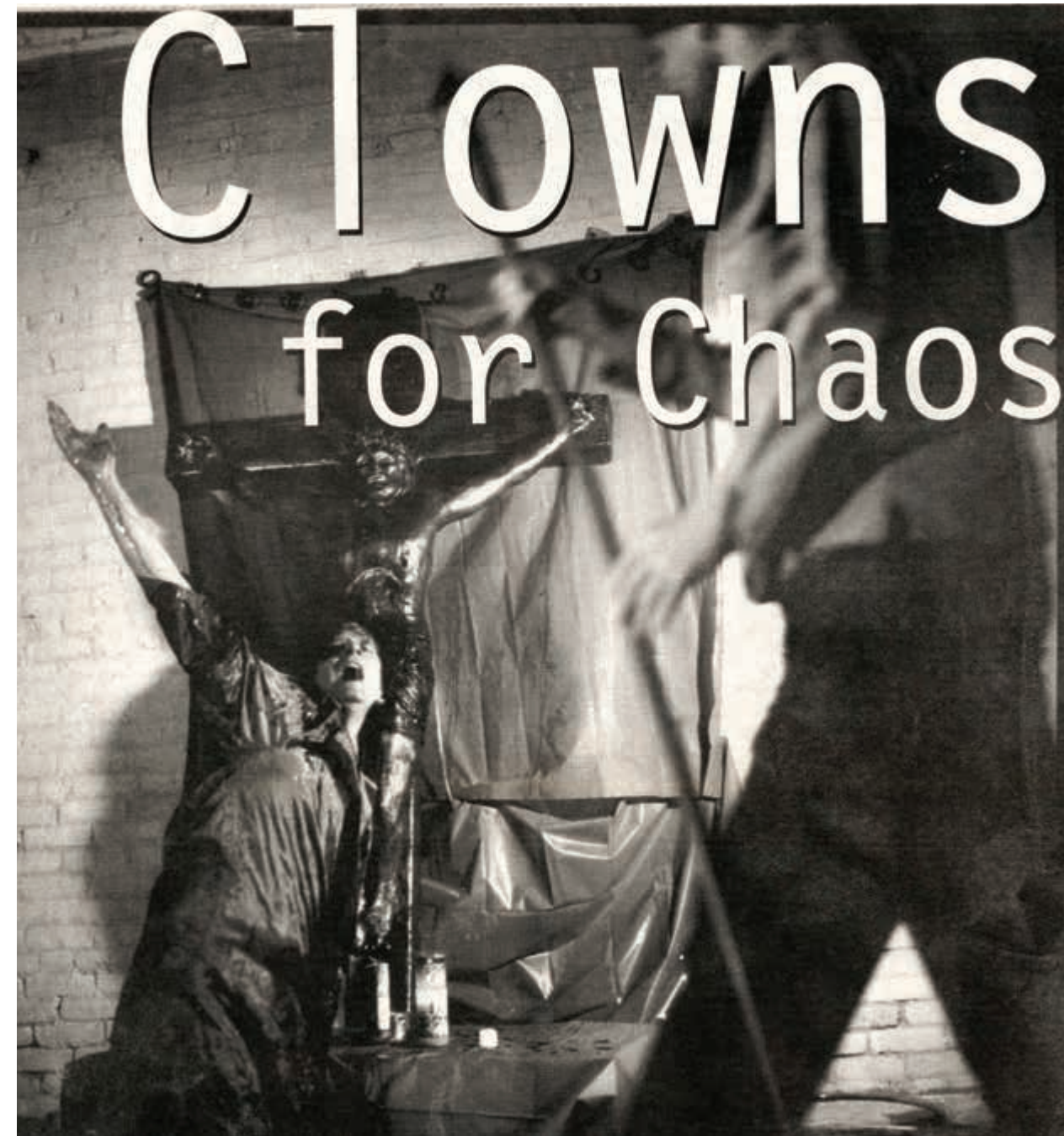
#### Afterword (2012 comments)

I’m sure there must be some way to make Cacophony work in the Internet age. All those beautiful mail art decorations would probably not be worth their trouble today.

And I kind of think the Net has splintered society so much into niche interests that Cacophony is no longer called for; if you want to find a group for urban exploration, there are dozens online. If guerilla theater is more your thing, check out Improv Everywhere or its dozen knock-offs; for subvertising, go to Adbusters or its imitators. No central Cacophony clearinghouse is required these days to connect people with these disparate pursuits. The Internet is all about “alt” culture and its armchair pursuit.



Above: In April 2001, Reverend Al Ridenour is burned in effigy for abandoning his post as “Grand Instigator” of the Los Angeles Lodge. Though the immolation is actually celebratory, Ridenour’s retirement is not without controversy as he ends his decade-long tenure with an explosively divisive prank, convincing many that he and an inner cadre have abandoned core principles to become born-again Christians.



### The Cacophony Society's Carnival of the Absurd

*LA Weekly*, Vol. 16 No. 35, 1994

Jac Zinder

For the past three years, a growing group of art-damaged kids, kitsch hounds, and amateur clown have gathered together under the banner of the Los Angeles Cacophony Society. It's a social group for the antisocial, and its franchise in absurdity is growing. Jac Zinder reports on an art cult that takes as much from *Mad* as it does from *Artforum*.

Reverend Al sweats profusely, thick gobs of white pancake makeup oozing down his lips and covering his teeth as his turquoise '64 Dodge Dart swerves up the 101 freeway. He and three other passengers are dressed as ragged rodeo clowns. Al sports an orange felt cowboy hat with a patch that says "Plumbers Have Bigger Tools," a sooty, trash-covered black sport jacket, striped leggings and black toy sunglasses about two sizes too small for his head, whose rainbow-patterned cardboard lenses cause him to squint and wildly careen across lanes.

Jac Zinder's in-depth piece on LA Cacophony in the *LA Weekly* brought a good deal of attention to the 2nd lodge. He became a dedicated and well-liked Cacophonist by the time this article hit the streets. Tragically, Jac was killed by a drunk driver on Thanksgiving the same year that this article was published.

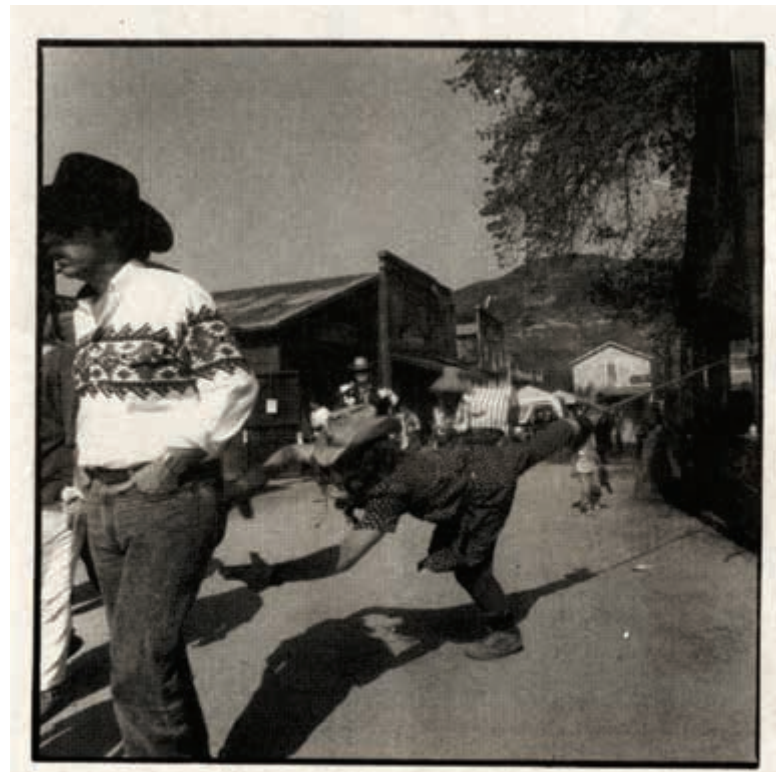
Michael Bump, a CalArts student in his mid-20s, with a goatee, a nose ring, and a cheap thrift-store dress, pounds on the roofs, spreads the cheeks of his hairy, bare ass and moons recoiling passers out of the back window. "That'll teach them to stare at clowns," he shouts. The car lunges violently to the right as Tonya Geddes (a.k.a. Chuckles the Clown), a former stripper at Jumbo's Clown Room presently baring green teeth, fake freckles, and knotted pigtails, smashes against the passenger door. "It would be great if we got in a big pileup," she yelps in a thick and ridiculously phony Southern accent. "Imagine the Highway Patrolmen trying to figure out why all of the bloody clown parts were strewn all over the highway."

For the past three years, a growing group of art-damaged kids, kitsch hounds and amateur clowns have gathered together under the banner of the Los Angeles Cacophony Society. It's a social group for the antisocial: those who prefer to think of themselves as outcasts. Each month, they organize a series of activities that get them out of the dank corners of boho enclaves

like coffeehouses and underground night-clubs and into smudgy and pleasingly confusing worlds of their own making. They'll do everything from worshiping at altars of bastardized Tiki culture to unannounced picnics in junkyards to today's affair, which involves the infiltration of a banjo and fiddle contest. With their dripping makeup, rubbishy, ill-fitting costumes and jerry-rigged instruments, they're fully aware that just by pulling up to the front gate they'll make a scene. Which is probably why Al screeched around that last corner and kicked up a cloud of dust when he did.

Despite his two-and-a-half-foot-high, bright-orange cowboy hat and a slightly dingy polyester clown suit, Adam Bregman, a.k.a. Asswipe the Clown, looks like the most respectable of the four. (Last year, as one of 24 candidates for mayor of Los Angeles, Bregman got 643 votes.) So he talks their way into the festival. Even though he keeps changing his story and muttering nonsense to the rest of the clowns, one of the festival organizers waves them in. He probably figures that he's getting some cheap entertainment.

Agoura has one of those faux-Western movie-set villages complete with old barns and hitching posts. People gather around table upon table of pennywhistles, harmonicas, dog-eared sheet music, footlong crystals and glass unicorn figurines. Everywhere you look, groups of guitarists spontaneously break into songs and wetly



Killer Klowns: "Why, if I weren't tied to this barn, I'd smash your brain in."

harmonize. In an open field, next to a towering tepee, about 100 people fold-dance. It's a perfect setting for a bluegrass festival and a prime spot for Cacophony.

"Howdy, honky!" Gump shouts. "Damn, I thought that this was supposed to be a multicultural festival." Al lamely square-dances with a group of elderly women. Bregman and Skylaire Gifvergren, an eerily quiet teenage girl, horn in on a bluegrass singer's performance. But, instead of being horrified as the Cacophonists had hoped, most everybody just seems entertained by them. After all, they're clowns.

Gump finds a hitching post and ties his leg to it with an old rope, growling like a rabid dog and lunging into the dirt. Al bends down to a kid and waves a toy pistol in the air. "Have you ever used a firearm?" he asks. "Well, here's my offer. You can either shoot anybody here in the head at close range or you can beat on that clown over there as hard as you can."

The kid shoots Al a look of utter confusion. "You sure that you don't want to hit him in the face? It'll cause permanent damage." And with that, the little monster picks up Al's plastic bat and whales on Gump and Bregman. "Why, if I weren't tied to this bar, I'd smash your brain in," Gump yells at the top of his lungs as they all start in on a weirdly violent Punch-and-Judy routine, beating each other with plastic bats, cursing, and howling. "Life is cruel and

violence is alluring!” Bregman shouts as more kids get in on the act, lining up to do a little punch-the-clown while their parents cheer them on.

When one little boy gets too riled up and starts to cry, Al pounds on a portable toilet and says, “Next show in a half-hour, right in this room. Come see us in the toilet, and don’t be scared, a clown doesn’t bite.”

Three National Park rangers on horse-back trot up and jokingly ask Gump if he has a license to perform. “No sir,” he says, stuffing a hand down his pants. “Just a license to molest children.” Amazingly, they just laugh, shake their heads and ride off. But a parent standing within earshot isn’t amused and calls them back. Ten minutes later, Gump is being led away in handcuffs.

A cluster of preteen hippie kids gathers around the cute little movie-set jailhouse where Gump is being interrogated. They stomp their feet and chant, “Free the clown!”

A ranger comes out of the office and bellows at them, which shuts them up for a bit, but a few minutes later, they’re at it again. Mopping his knotted brow, the same ranger rushes out and scolds the kids. As he leads a liberated Gump out of the office, he gruffly says to Al, “What did you think you were gonna gain by acting the way that you did?” “We’re just a bunch of clowns, sir. That’s all,” Al deadpans. “We just love to entertain.”

“Well, your brand of entertainment just isn’t right,” the officer says, annoyed that he has to take another jab from these freaks. “So gather all of your friends up; I want you out of here. Now.” And with that, he personally escorts them out of the festival, as the kids start cheering again. “Those kids are Cacophonists at heart,” Bregman says. “You know what we’re doing? We’re developing more clowns.”

Cacophony’s a franchise of absurdity. Today, besides L.A., there are branches in San Francisco, Seattle and Portland. They’ll all gather at the ninth annual Burning Man festival, a communal get-together where hundreds gather in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert to worship and then destroy a four-story neon-and-wood effigy. It takes place over the Labor Day weekend.

The origins of Cacophony come from the gnarled roots of S.F.’s Communitarity. Created in 1971, it was an alternative university, one of those typically San Franciscan hippie trips where anybody with enough “life experience” could teach a class on any subject. One of the classes taught at the school was named the Suicide Club, which attracted the more extreme elements of Communitarity and branched off as a separate entity in 1977. Spearheaded by Gary Warne, one of Communitarity’s founders, it took its name

from a Robert Louis Stevenson story about a group of people who tried to live every day as if it were their last and ran concurrently with Communitarity until they both disbanded.

Right away, they wanted to set themselves apart; Warne was notoriously shy of publicity, keeping the club as inbred as possible. Potential members had to go through bizarre initiation rites and communicated through a secretive newsletter. They prided themselves on being outrageous, sneaking into mortuaries and throwing morbid parties, scaling the Golden Gate Bridge, infiltrating cults such as the California Nazi Party and the Moonies by posing as prospective members, just for the hell of it. But after a few years of this, the pressures of topping themselves event after event became too great (and Communitarity was fizzling out); they finally disbanded in 1982. One year later, Warne died of heart failure.

In 1986, over bad coffee and greasy scrambled eggs, some of the former Suicide Club members got together and formed the San Francisco Cacophony Society, which, like its former incarnation, dedicated itself to the exploration of the bizarre. But this time, they decided to lighten up a bit. “Gary had very strong ideas about the danger of publicity, so we really never allowed any press on Suicide,” says Sebastian Melmoth, a SF Cacophony early member, who was involved with Suicide from 1977 on. “That was mainly because most of our events were illegal or somehow dangerous. When we started Cacophony, we made a conscious effort to network with other groups of individuals who were also involved in doing unusual things, and media coverage only makes us more accessible to them.”

As before, they planned a month’s worth of events and listed them in a newsletter. Now called *Rough Draft*, the newsletter extended an open invitation to new members. The activities moved from the illegal to the idiotic, from slipping into abandoned buildings to taking drinking tours in the seedy underbelly of S.F.’s Tenderloin district. There are no requirements or hooded rituals necessary for membership. Anybody who would enjoy, say, taking a tour of the city sewers in formal attire could be considered part of the society.

When organizer Maxwell Maude briefly moved to Los Angeles in 1990, he decided to start up a local arm of Cacophony based on the original model. At first, he printed a truncated version of *Rough Draft*, retitling it *Tales from the Zone*, (after S.F. Cacophony’s “zone trips,” excursions outside of the city; “The Zone” also refers to “the state of consciousness where members hopefully end up during events,” Al says) and listing a couple of hastily conceived events at the back. He left them in coffeehouses and announced that Cacophony was

looking for other like-minded souls to start an LA branch. The response wasn’t immediate, but over the course of a few months membership expanded.

The Zone slowly distinguished itself in Los Angeles, publicizing affairs like ‘50s style street drag races and Gabriel Baltierra’s Laundromat poetry readings and Blue Line spoken-word soirees. But there still wasn’t enough solid interest to really get Cacophony established here. Time was running out, because Maude was planning to move back to San Francisco.

This was shortly after Al Ridenour moved to town. He’d arrived in ‘89 from the Midwest, to study film at UCLA. For kicks, he hung around with Eric Brown and a group of alcoholic poets who called themselves Rats With Keys. Named after their literary zine, they were an informal bunch of yahoos who partied and occasionally staged impromptu plays and spoken, (more like slurred), word performances. On the Cut Foot telephone line (310-CUT-FOOT), Brown or one of this pals would (and still do) announce whatever they considered to be the cool events of the day, from Cacophony outings to punk-rock gigs to parties to art openings.

Through them, Ridenour had attended the Blue Line poetry events and drunk a lot of Crazy Horse. But he really hadn’t given Cacophony much thought.

While struggling to slug down “an over-extracted espresso” at a mid-Wilshire coffeehouse, Ridenour thumbed through a pile of flyers and found a Zone that listed an event called “Close Encounters of the 5th Kind.” Basically, the Cacophonists were going to drop in on a UFO convention, poke some ironic fun at unsuspecting “spaced-out earthlings,” and distribute bogus flyers announcing the coming of an intergalactic apparition called “the Magnetic Jesus,” whom the Cacophonists were planning to land in Marina del Rey Park.

“When I grew up, I had always been obsessed with weird religions and cults, so I immediately called Max up and told him that I wanted in. That night, I sat down and wrote up a proposal for all kinds of things that I would want to organize with them, but it was beyond their scope at the time.” Maude suggested Ridenour get his feet wet by first helping with the space landing. That night he became Reverend Al.



Above: Using a banner “borrowed” from a nearby church, LA Cacophony clowns (insider spelling: klowns) Gimpy and Sneery offer an impenetrably mixed and traffic-blocking message during one of the many Klown incursions that formed a mainstay of LACS activities. Often led by Asswipe and Chuckles the Klown, these truculent funsters celebrated unscheduled birthday parties in office buildings, protested the Academy Awards, offered an unwelcome performance at a festival held at an old movie ranch (ending with one klown held in a mock jail), and performed a less than reverent re-enactment of Christ’s passion.

During the landing, Maude—dressed head to toe in a silver Mylar space suit—crawled from the burning wreckage of a toy air balloon. Al spouted drooling gibberish in a drunken haze and soiled a priest's robe he was wearing by rolling around on a 200-foot-long aluminum-foil cross laid out on a dewy lawn.

**We are the pranksters, poets, artists,  
undisciplined children, wise fools, and wise asses,  
the bug under the rug, the termites in society's  
crutches, the bad egg at the corporate picnic,  
the vital spirits of cultural fermentation.  
You may already be a member!  
-from *The Zone***

"I had recently come here from the Midwest and longed to be involved with something besides going to art openings and clubs," Al says. A tall, handsome guy in his early 30s with dyed black hair and a pierced ear, Al gets so excited when he talks about his latest weird discovery that he nearly stutters. He describes his family as "wealthy transients" who moved all over the country when he was growing up. From his mid-teens through early 20s, he lived in Evansville, Indiana, and majored in English and German literature at Indiana University.

While his two older brothers found God, Al worked part time in a mental hospital and developed an affinity for the unusual. "They went Jesus-freaking and never came out of it," Al says. "One owns a Bible bookstore and the other one is archly conservative, but I had always been obsessed with weird religions and cults. I started to collect filing cabinets of flyers, religious tracts and pamphlets of cheesy tourism, and, thanks to my mom, ears full of gloriously bad music." With Cacophony, Al has found an audience eager for the dissemination and celebration of the cults that obsessed him. For the last three years he's been at the pulpit of LA's Cacophony, writing, publishing and distributing *The Zone*, and coming up with many events.

When members want to create events, they'll pitch their ideas to Al. His guidelines for approval are based on the San Francisco model: basically any cracked idea is fine, as long as it is not-for-profit and not used to promote any religious or political point of view. Al adds one more

stipulation: "Lately, there are lots of lightweight ideas floating around, like yard sales and hiking jaunts which are fine in and of themselves, but not for Cacophony. I prefer to do edgy events, ones that require lots of participation and are outlandish."

There's a thread that binds events from scurrying around on the streets of Hollywood dressed like garbage to dropping in on Echo Park's Superet Light Church to drunkenly snicker through a sermon. By not aligning itself with anything other than the exploration and creation of the unusual, Cacophony tries to tie various fringes together. It's no fun discovering the latest crackpot UFO theory if all you're gonna get from the people you try to tell it to are blank stares. Better to share your secrets with some guy in a clown suit. Someone who understands.

Since it started back in '91, L.A. Cacophony has developed a network of more than 200 members, a group ranging from late teens to late 30s, largely college-educated hipsters. In San Francisco, it has a racially and socially mixed group of participants with some as old as 65. Of course, it's been around in one form or another since the early '70s, so there's a broader base to draw upon up there.

"When I came to LA from San Francisco, I made a beeline for the society," says Krista Krol, an art student at Santa Monica College of Design, Art and Architecture. "I was involved with Cacophony up there, and that's where I met a lot of my close friends. We shared a bond that put us apart from the rest. I didn't know anybody in town who got excited by the same kinds of things that I did. Since I've been involved down here, I've put on a number of events: art car painting, Valentine's Day voodoo rites and a memorial service for my old car that we did in Pick-Your-Part. I knew that I'd meet like-minded deviants through Cacophony."

Like the surrealists and Dadaists before them, the Cacophonists revel in the shocked stare, the confused head shake of the straights. They band together because the more people there are, the easier it is to make a scene. When one guy walks down Hollywood Boulevard covered in garbage, you think he must be nuts. But when a whole group does it, it's a movement.

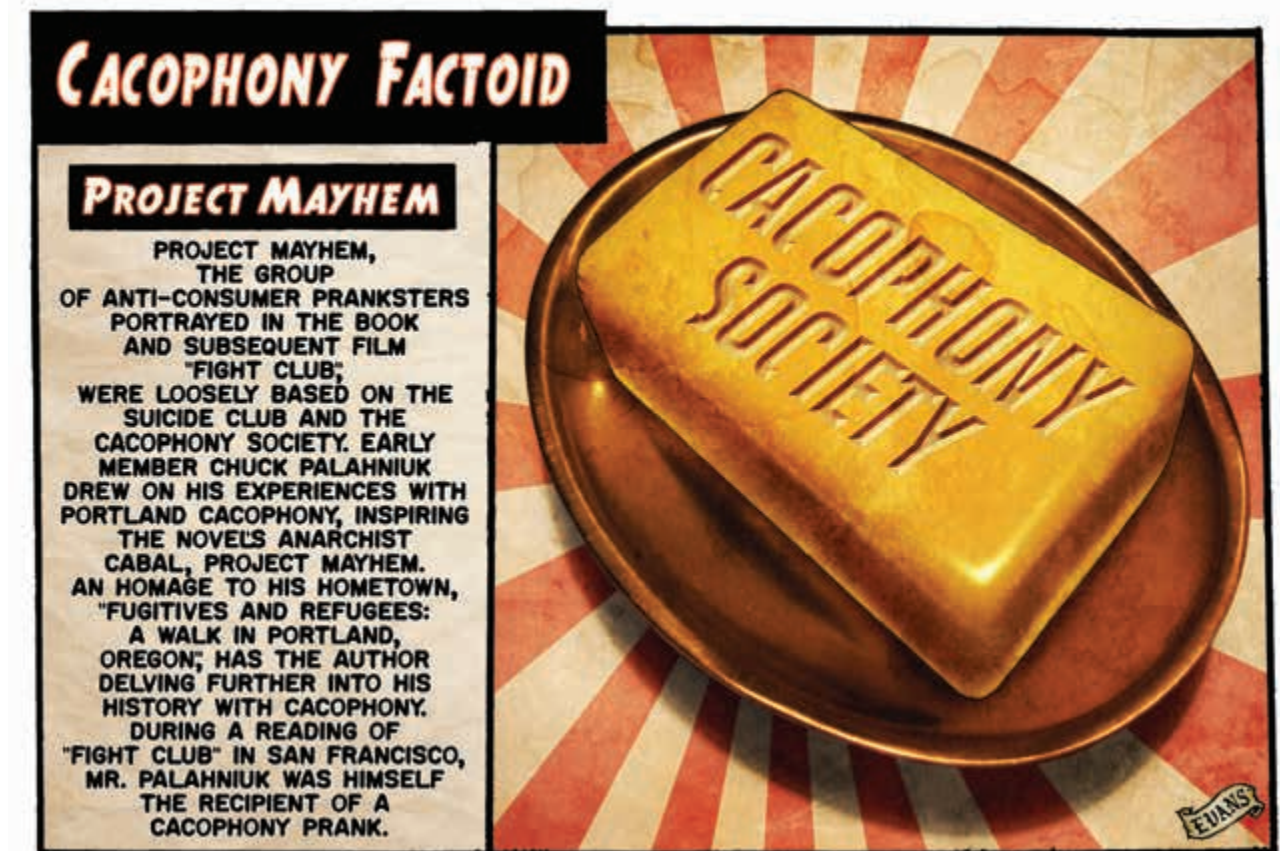
Cacophony members like to remind you just how weird they are, whether dressing as bears and fucking up a Sunday-afternoon picnic in Griffith Park or painting flames and cow skulls on their cars and driving around town, pleased as hell at the attention. Unlike the oddballs they so love to celebrate, however, the Cacophonists have the advantage of being able to wash off whatever they've rolled in.

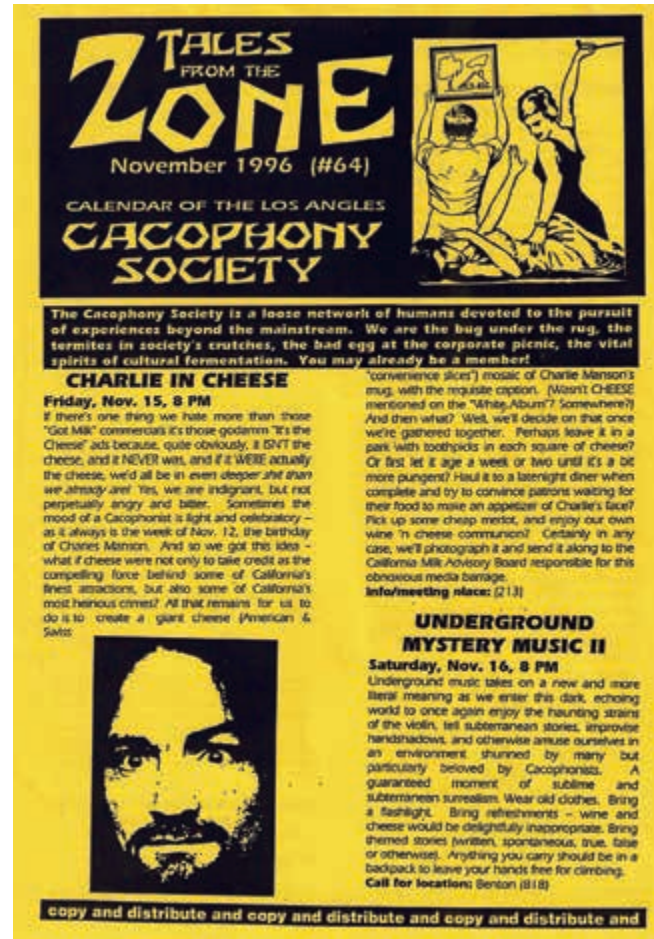
There's an openness to the events, a haphazardness that makes them all that much more appealing to members. For the most part, the only structure or guidelines to the events are what Al writes down in *The Zone*. For "Cacophony Delight," creator Invisible Ray, a slightly disheveled, soft-spoken guy in his mid-30s who lives in his car, noticed that a lot of people read the newsletter but don't have the time to go to events. So he got a bunch of members together to deliver Cacophony to them. They had only three takers. For one, "I had no idea what was going to happen until we got to the place,"

Ray says. "Asswipe and Chuckles came along in clown gear. We caused mayhem for about 45 minutes, burst in singing filthy songs, blowing on kazoos, and chasing three people around their house. We tied this one woman up with tape, and she got so into it that she sent me over to her neighbor's house. She said that he needed a dose of Cacophony." He wasn't home.

At "Miracle of the Bleeding Cross," the Cacophonists emulate the spectacles they had read about in religious texts. A crowd of about 75 people gathered in the parking lot of Los Feliz's Mondo Video; a giant crucifix that was supposed to squirt on command had been erected. With projections of TV evangelists flickering on brick walls, someone shaking a metal sheet for thunder effects, and the wheezing sound of a phase-shifted harmonium swirling behind him, Reverend Al, a purple robe barely covering his worn high-top sneakers, rambled incoherently about blood and the power of money, grabbed and blindfolded audience members for a game of "Pin the Jesus on the Cross," and brought out "wretched souls" (Cacophony members) to be saved from afflictions like pubic lice and boredom.

Naturally, there were about five clowns in attendance, serving no apparent purpose. When the big moment arrived for the cross to squirt its stickiness over the throng, nothing happened. Al enlisted the assistance of





Cacophonist Donovan Lerman, who gladly filled the thing when he found out that meant blowing a couple jugs of cheap wine into it. After endless spirituals and disturbing tongue-in-cheek testimonials by three 250-pound, balding thespians, Al was ready to try again. Donovan was piss-drunk, but the cross still barley trickled. Two minutes later, Al was running through the crowd with it, drenching everybody within range, as the clowns skipped around the parking lot, screaming, dumping huge sacks of popcorn everywhere, and setting off fireworks, ending the thing in a blaze of pure cacophony.

If you talk to most members, they'll shy away from aligning themselves with art history, even though a lot of them have studied art. Al says he wants to "celebrate anything that could accelerate the decay of traditional aesthetics." Smells like art to me, but it reeks just as strongly of *Mad* as of *Artforum*. They want to create their own little unreality, away from the constraints of an art gallery or nightclub.

With Cacophony, the lines between audience and performer are destroyed. Members of Cacophony create their own entertainments, diversions, and realities by inserting eccentric behavior into everyday environments. When they cover themselves in mud and stroll down

Rodeo Drive, stumble through Universal CityWalk dressed like post-apocalyptic zombies, or sell bars of mud on Venice Beach as a phony mud-craft organization, they're obviously in it for the pure spectacle. But in their own ridiculous way, they're saying something about how segments of society alienate each other. We are the outcasts, Cacophonists cry out; but look at yourself, you don't fit in either. Who would want to?

The Lowenbrau Keller restaurant looks like the kind of place where Wagner would swill steins of lager with a couple of Valkyries. Gold-framed reproductions of enormous 19th-century masterpieces, chipped Greek statues, horribly contorted mannequins in suits of armor, and huge chandeliers fill the room to overflowing. Everywhere there are antlers. A German pop hit skips endlessly over the house PA. Seated at a long table at the back of the German restaurant are Reverend Al and 15 of his flock.

They're chugging pitchers of dark beer and animatedly recalling their proudest pranks. Like the time that Jennifer pretended to pass out and had her body outlined in chalk in front of the Dresden Room, or the time Karen met Al at the UFO landing, or the look on Altadena artist Jirayr Zorthian's face when 100 Cacophonists showed up at his artists' enclave for a tour. When the gabfest calms down, I propose my own prank.

I wanted the Cacophonists to think of an elaborate hoax for this article and mail it to me. I received only two letters—a four-page treatise on Cacophony from Invisible Ray and two eloquently written manifestos from Reverend Al. Neither was a hoax, but they both probed deeper that anybody has been willing to do face-to-face.

Al's letter contained the following: "I really do believe that our events can be appreciated on many levels and whoever had the capacity for rumination can go home after an outing and assign to it a certain spiritual significance. The grotesque and irrational are exactly the qualities that we Cacophonists want to celebrate. Exploring the weird gives me an ecstatic rush, a spiritually expansive sense of wonder and innocence and I feel a calling, the need to share this with others. That's the goal of my work with Cacophony, to guide the willing and unwilling into mazes of dumb befuddlement, to help them experience the rejuvenating power of the bizarre. And once we have drunk from the well of weirdness, we then replenish it by our own actions, creating inexplicable spectacles of human otherness. Man escapes the mundane through violation of his regimented world of scientific, aesthetic and social law. We sell the tickets. We know that something's out there, so that's where we hang out.



**Portland Cacophony's Nuclear Family Picnic**

Reverend Chuck was loading stuffed animals into a large bore, home-made mortar using a broom handle. Jim Skinner had welded this "home-defense" cannon together especially for the day's festivities. I was in Portland for a visit, and, luckily my trip co-incident with a Portland Cacophony's annual Nuclear Family Picnic. The Trojan Plant was situated on a lovely stretch of nature alongside the grand Columbia River just northwest of Portland. We drove our mutant vehicles, many of them standards from the Portland Beaters Club, around the barricades and into the verdant, overgrown garden alongside the decommissioned nuclear power facility. Back in 1970, right in the middle of the early anti-nuke movement, some industry flack figured it would help the plant's public profile to create a pleasant, manicured public access park directly under the ominously looming cooling tower that squatted like some colossal toad along side the reactor core.

This was indeed the perfect place for a family picnic: a family of mutants! Barbecued meat of very suspect origins was passed around from clubbed fists to what appeared to be flipper-like appendages of the various mutants, to be crammed into their gaping maws. Someone had constructed a large trebuchet for hurling

animals not already slated for cannon fodder. Watching a purple Barney doll prescribe a perfect arc over the razor wire atop the plant's defense perimeter fence, I wondered why security had not yet made a grounds survey, or in any other way shown any interest in our illicit gathering, and the amateur projectile seminar taking place alongside the plant. I decided to walk the fence line with the vague idea of maybe sneaking onto the grounds. Sure enough, a few hundred feet down the fence line there was a hole cut along the very bottom of the fence, just big enough to crawl under. I took a deep breath and wiggled under, fully expecting black clad nuke plant ninjas to drop on me out of the trees. Nothing. I crouched and, eyes squinting, went further into the compound. No ninjas. I walked even further. Nothing. Excellent! I looked up the hill to the massive cooling tower. Maybe, with a group, we could make it up there and get inside the thing, just like the dentist, dozens of black clad rappellers and Sam Lowry in the movie *Brazil*! Hmmmm... we'd need a cute kid and a dog for sympathy, in case we were apprehended: "It was the dog, officer... she ran through the hole in the fence and, well, we HAD TO rescue her before she got lost in the plant and, well, irradiated or something!"

I went back to the picnic to see who was game for a little exploration.



Above: LA Cacophony Society's monthly newsletter, *Tales From The Zone*. LA was, and remains, the first Cacophony "Zone."

Above: Marci "Cupcake" McFarland and cute decoy dog at the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant "Nuclear Family Picnic" outside of Portland, OR.



Marci McFarland, Kevin Mathieu, a cute kid, a dog, me and a few others crawled under the fence and crept up the hill to another chain link job that ringed the base of the tower. We walked all around looking for some breach in this barricade that was keeping us from the tantalizing edifice that hovered just above us. So close and yet so far... Victor and I were debating the wisdom of trying to get the crew over the fence or perhaps tunneling. I climbed over, avoiding the barbed wire with some difficulty, and scraping my leg pretty well in the process. I looked over, and there was Kevin on my side, the private side of the heavily fortified fence, grinning. He had simply walked up to the (unlocked) gate and opened it up.

We crept several stories up an exterior metal staircase to a single doorway right in the curved surface of the cooling tower's concrete battlements, all the while keeping an eye on the two or three security trucks at the bottom of a gradual slope, several hundred feet to the north, and parked in front of the reactor building. The doorway was unlocked! Inside, a grid of horizontal concrete beams atop vertical beams spanning to the bottom of the tower pit below afforded us an easy stroll out to the exact middle of the massive tower. Not wanting to push our luck too much, we soon packed it in and slunk back through the fences rejoining our fellow mutants at the picnic, literally glowing from our recent exploration.



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#1 CACOPHONY SOCIETY  
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OCT 20

PRESENTS  
**CEMETERY CINEMA**

Safe for Children & Animals

*(Small text below: IN THE FILL "MOTHER OF THE LIVING DEAD", THE "CACOPHONY SOCIETY" IS BORN...)*

Sick ... and Wrong  
Portland Cacophony  
July 2000

MEANINGLESS MADNESS  
OCTOBER 1995  
THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE PORTLAND CACOPHONY SOCIETY

The month of September has been filled with the dusty remnants of Buring Man, haunting us and beckoning us...

**Pandemonium**  
SUMMER 1994 • THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE PORTLAND CACOPHONY SOCIETY • ISSUE TW

Opposite page top: Nuclear Family Radiation Badge. Bottom: The Reverend Charles Linville and Our Lady of Internal Combustion. Linville was Portland's most visible member. He was also a career letter carrier for the US Postal Service. His superiors were reputedly VERY careful when assigning his postal routes. He typically got the best ones. Above: Many Lodges renamed their newsletters contingent on the whim of that month's editor. Advertisements for valuable commercial services were frequently included in the mailers. There is no record for how much business Cacophony generated for Smith and Smyth.

July 1995 (206) 251-1185 Issue 27

**MACHINATION**

The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society. We are imaginary painters using reality as our canvas, eccentric poets crafting verse from daily life, makeshift sculptors chiseling experience from silken dreams, blue collar laborers of mirth, tailors stitching fantastic costumes out of thin air and mischievous clerks choreographing a delicate ballet with documents and files. You may already be a member!

**Plots Plans & Schemes of the Seattle Cacophony Society**

scacophn@seanews.akita.com

**IT HAPPENED IN JUNE**

Despite informative handouts and personal testimonials many weekend shoppers refused to believe in the wondrous doings of socks. Even the communists on the opposite corner had no comments about the first falline. \* A handful of brave paranormal researchers endure cold, rain and cheap vodka in an attempt to contact creatures from outer space. The unseasonably harsh weather was determined to be the result of supernatural forces bent on thwarting the expedition. \* A shortage of vehicles and severe mechanical difficulties with those brought caused the Big Wheel GP to be one of the shortest events ever, but spectators were amused and none of the racers were seriously injured.

**SOUNDS LIKE CACOPHONY**

Sunday, July 16th from 6-10 PM. Somewhere in Time Unlimited presents a Carnival in Venice at the Center for Wooden Boats 1010 Valley street on lake Union. A gondola and gondolier will be providing boat rides and a potluck supper begins at 8:30. \$3. Inf.

**CACOPHONY COMMENTS**

Artists in Paris have taken to protesting the city's doggy doo problem by placing the rim of a hollowed plate over the offensive offal, garnishing it with salad and a meatball and drawing utensils on either side of the setting. \* Two new theme restaurants have recently opened in NYC. One sports an entire serving staff comprised of twins-do you have to tip twice? and the other co-owned by super model Cindy Crawford has a robotic likeness of herself which will happily take your drink orders as you wait to be seated. \* Researchers at Japan's Keio University, in Tokyo, claim they have taught their pigeons how to

distinguish a cubist-style painting - one of Pablo Picasso's most famous genres - from a Claude Monet-style Impressionist work. When asked to identify which was cubist, the birds picked the right painting with 90 percent accuracy. Psychologist Shigeru Watanabe regretted that the birds were unable to discern a Cezanne from a Renoir.

**SUBSCRIBE**

When you subscribe you not only insure that each issue of Machination will be delivered to your door in a cool art envelope or that you'll receive bizarre prank flyers, but you'll also be helping to keep the voice mail hotline running and the distribution of hundreds of newsletters to cafes, bookstores & unsuspecting tourist information kiosks. \$10/12 issues, \$18/24. Send a check/money written to "CASH" to: P.O. Box Seattle, WA 98103-1848.

**ALL EVENTS ARE FREE, IN SEATTLE, AND THE RESULT OF THEIR SPONSORS INSPIRATION, CREATIVITY AND DREAMS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED!**

For those with WWW access check out the Seattle Cacophony page at <http://www.halcyon.com/snitar/cacoph.html>

**UNIVERSITY MASTERS OPEN**

**BADMINTON GOLF**

When: Saturday, July 15th, 12:30 PM  
Where: The steps of Schmitz Hall, on Campus Parkway between University Way & 15th Ave NE  
Your Host: Nicholas Jack  
Bring: A racquet, some shuttlecocks, no sense of self-consciousness

If horse racing is the sport of kings, & golf is the sport of ex- Presidents, & Badminton the sport of the Upper Class, then the noble pursuit of Badminton Golf is the sport of the ex-upper-class- Presidents. Please be welcome to a set of Badminton Golf on the beautiful grounds of the University of Washington. Please wear golf-appropriate attire.

**THE CACOPHONY MEETING**

When: Tuesday, July 18th, 7:30 PM  
Where: Green Room Cafe, 4026 Stone Way N.  
Bring: \$ for food and drink.

"The Chair recognizes Shifty the Clown. Shifty you now have the floor" - NOT! The monthly meeting is a social brainstorm where we swap stories about past events, upcoming ones and some we've yet to imagine. Join in this discourse of free association reminiscing and add your own bent to reality.

**2nd annual INANIMATE OBJECT BUNGEE JUMP WITH DONNER PARTY "TASTES LIKE CHICKEN" MEMORIAL PICNIC & BBQ**

When: 2:30 PM, Saturday, July 22nd  
Where: Pedestrian bridge over Ravenna Park on 20th Ave NE (between NE 62nd and NE 58th)  
What to bring: Objects to bungee; food & drink to share; BBQ grill. Info: Sheboogity Man @

Help us turn one of Seattle's loveliest parks into a death-defying arena of terror for non-living objects. We will be hurling small objects attached to bungee cords securely anchored to a bridge overlooking Ravenna Park. As there is public park below, please do not bring bowling balls, high explosives, wine glasses, hamsters, or bags of wet cement. Small non-lethal objects encouraged, 2 to 7lbs. Used china, toasters, and Ken dolls are welcome. We will also BBQ on the bridge.



**ADVENTURES IN ZOMBIE TOWN**

When: Saturday, July 29th, 7:30 PM  
Where: Seattle Center's Center House South Entrance.

Out of the darkness of space they came to conquer with their precious pods, but met great resistance. Neither triumphant nor vanquished the Pod People return with their insidious plot for world domination. The time has come for you to test your cunning & endurance as the Citizens of Earth struggle to defend it against the mindless space zombies. Will this encounter end in another stalemate or will one side finally be victorious?

Zombie Town adventures consist of games adapted from competitive strategy games such as capture the flag, foxes 'n hounds and hide & go seek. Moderate physical exertion is required. Your contact: The Man with Strange Eyes

**CACOPHONY-IN-A-BOX. . . a Collation Project:**

Send 105 copies of your work; any size, medium, theme or technique. No catalogs; it must fit into a box the size of a ream of a paper. All participants will receive one copy of the assemblage. Deadline: August 1, 1995. Cacophony in a box P.O. Box Seattle, WA 98103-1848.

**MACHINATION**

Plans, Plots and Schemes of the Seattle Cacophony Society. Phone: Issue #13, May 1994



The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society. We are tailors mending the rip in the fabric of reality, clown of cerebral slapstick pranks, daycare workers of the inner child, sailors on a sea of smirks, potholes in the information superhighway, busybodies of the bizarre and statisticians of impossibility chances... You may already be a member!

**The Urban Ballroom**

Graceful figures glide through the night guided by the gentle notes of a They Might Be Giants polka in an evening of dance (well actually dance instruction.) This event is primarily intended to teach the Waltz, Polka and several easy and fun group dances to novice/non dancers, but everyone is encouraged to attend. You don't need to dance to have fun so bring along your two left feet and help keep the dancers in time. Your host: Yahooo Doorslop

When: Saturday, May 7th, 7:00 PM  
Where: Volunteer Park Art Museum parking lot, over looking the reservoir (Prospect and 14th).  
Bring: Comfy shoes and water to drink.

**SoundGarden Pick-A-Nick**

Bring things to bang, thrash, strum, pluck, twiddle, thump, tinkle, yodel and eat the food. Co-sponsored by Ringmaster Ned (that's me) and the Cast of Thousands Cacophony Orchestra. You MAY bring an instrument you can play, but you have to pass it on to someone who CANT play it. We don't have any electrical bookups, so this is an acoustic affair. Rain date: sometime after the film festival. Call Ringmaster Ned (that's me) at for further information. When: Saturday, May 14th, 1:30 PM  
Where: The Sound Garden, (enter Warren G. Magnuson Park from the Sand Point entrance and you will find it).  
Bring: food and drink to share (park rules apply about alcoholic beverages).

**The Cacophony Meeting**

Wanna hear about a really cool event that you missed? Got an event idea you need help with? Found an exciting abandoned bunker just waiting for an event, but you haven't thought of one yet? Come slam your neurons together during our monthly story swap and brainstorm. Announce your first exciting event, learn more about the next one, check out the newsletters from Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles and eat good food. When: Tuesday, May 17th, 7:30 pm.  
Where: The Green Room Cafe, 4026 Stone Way North (at 41st)  
Bring: \$ for food or drink.

**Pie Fu U**

Master the Art of Pie throwing. Participants will be judged on the number of tasty pies in their personal arsenal. Course will include a demonstration, target practice, professional bout and free for all. Restrooms nearby. Spectators welcome, but bring a pie. Brought to you by Floppo the Clown. Call for pie secrets. When: Sunday, May 22nd, 1:00 - 2:00 PM  
Where: Far east region of Gas Works Park  
Bring: Creme pies, change of clothes, plastic bag, eye, nose, ear protection gear (optional).



**Sounds Like Cacophony:**

<- In honor of No-Diet day SAFFIR will host a Scale Smashing in front of Westlake mall. Sat. 5/7 11:00. \$3 donation. <- COCA presents: Street Rod Rally and Urban Drive-in. Sat. 5/28, 2 PM - Midnight at the Fremont U park Parking lot. Show off your rod from 2 till dusk; then clear the lot for a screening of "IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE" in 3D. Rally is free; the movie is \$3.00 <- Read along drama. The Green Room has an on going series of poetry and theater activities, call 'em for dates, times and titles

**Cacophony Comments:**

<- A St. Louis company was awarded a patent for gray Astromurf, which tests show increase chicken egg laying production by 35%. The inventors believe that the chickens feel more content with the same gray color as the galvanized steel cages they were hatched and raised in. <- The Japanese beer maker has an explosive new beverage. Instead of using plain old Carbon Dioxide to add bubbles to their brew a new manufacturer has begun using Hydrogen. This gas seems to have two side effects: it causes the imbiber's voice to rise and his/her belches become explosive. The first condition is reportedly used to help sing the high notes at Karaoke bars and the second is used for drinking games in which people compete for the longest flame from a belch. <-

**Been There, Done That...in April**

Only a few of the Elvis faithful showed up to honor the King at the Elyonic Convergence, but those who did enjoyed watching the confused reactions from adults and the blank stares of sugar rushed children. The Vortex Fest drew huge crowds with its powerful energy from the Crumple Zone. Several fortunes were told by the

Spaghetti Oracle and only 3 alien implants were detected. Many passersby wondered at the mysterious nature of the Oregon box. The Vashon Island Mystery Tour proved the excellent guidance abilities of the Mystery Chief. Unusual sights, intriguing people and a pleasant boat ride turn a regular little town in to an exotic getaway.

**To be done...in June:**

Sensory deprivation walking tour - Experience downtown Seattle in a new way. Ascend up 4th Ave - Boldly scale the three side-ways between Westlake Mall and Pine while avoiding Skaters and Shoppers. Slacker 'Fest - Watch a piece of stunning visual art and eat food with a 'tude. Audio Mystery Theater - A night of hand boiled ghost stories. Deadline for June event write-ups is May 23rd

**On the Horizon:**

The Urban Ballroom (early July) another night of parties and group dance (Goroutines). Bonus Bikini Beach (mid July) a wild and wacky video beach party with Frankie and Annette. In Search of the Zone (1st July) Three days of bad coffee, no sleep, constant driving and experiences you never knew that Washington could offer. Suburbanism Walking Tour (August) enter the bowels of Seattle for a formal cocktail party. The Gothic Nocturne Masquerade Ball (late August) An evening of fancy, dancing (from waltzes to the pogo), socializing and fun. Mammalian Solidarity Day (August) Show support for our hairy brethren. We lactate, we're proud. The Burning Man (Labor Day weekend) Three days of lounging in the sun, soaking in hot springs, bicycle golf, five axes croquet, formal cocktail parties, blowing things up and watching a 4 story tall wooden figure burn. The Radio Drive In (late September) A live radio drama from yesterday.

Do you have an event that you wish to sponsor? Mail us your write up or bring it to the next meeting.

**SUBSCRIPTION FITCH**

You lurk, naked, in a dark corridor hiding in the shadows as you watch a hulking mysterious figure stuff cruelly lettered envelopes into a gray box bearing your name. You stand there, as if held fast by an unseen hand, watching this never ending ritual until suddenly one day amongst the papers sent to seduce you into buying a veggiematic is a simple happy envelope affixed with an image of such amusing obscurity that light suddenly bursts into this dim hell, your invisible captor loses its grip and you see that the hulking figure wears the careful uniform of the U.S. Postal Service. What could possibly hold such power as to banish the horrors of junk mail? Nothing other than a subscription to Machination, the newsletter of the Seattle Cacophony Society. Each month subscribers receive a newsletter listing events sponsored by cacophony "members", other activities of interest, prank flyers, cute little toys and what ever else can be crammed into the envelope.

To subscribe send a check or money order made out to "CASH" to: PO Box Seattle, WA 98103-1848 12 issues/\$10 or 24 issues/\$18

**WHAT IS THIS ELYER?**

Machination, defined as the action or process of contriving or planning intrigue, is the monthly newsletter of the Seattle Cacophony Society. Each issue lists events sponsored by members, activities humd by like minded organizations and other items of interest. This publication is subscriber supported, copyright free and enthusiastically distributed to various cafes and coffee shops throughout the Sound. An electronic version is also posted on local computer bulletin boards. Please feel free to make copies and pass them along.

**WHAT IS THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY?**

Cacophony provides a network for individuals seeking adventures, socializing and fun. Your guess is as good as any for a specific definition.

**WHAT ARE EVENTS?**

An event is any out of the ordinary experience or unusual activity which allows participation by individuals. Events may be games, performances, classes and the like which are intended to be fun, not profit seeking nor politically or religiously promotional. No committee or group sets an agenda of activities. Events are the products of their sponsor's inspiration, creativity and dreams.

**WHO CAN ATTEND EVENTS?**

Events are open to all interested persons. Limitations on numbers of attendees or age may be required by the sponsor for the practical execution of the event. Participants may need to bring their own equipment and supplies to certain events and occasionally sponsors request a donation to cover their expenses.

**ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND IN SEATTLE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.**

For more information about the Cacophony Society, events, participation or this newsletter please call or write (PO Box Seattle, WA 98103-1848.)



Above and facing page: Machination was the monthly newsletter of the Seattle Cacophony Society.

**THE DETROIT CACOPHONY SOCIETY**

Peter Field

The Detroit Cacophony Society was started when neon sign maker, vintage objects collector, and San Francisco Cacophony Society member Dennis Borawski decided to put his Bay Area ghosts behind him and fled back to Michigan. He had grown up in Grosse Pointe, an affluent suburb just north of Detroit, where he claims that all the Grosse Pointe cops knew him when he was a teenager. It's the kind of place where if you're driving in a car from Detroit with a load of guys and it's late at night and you decide to take a short cut through Grosse Pointe on the way home, which is what several friends and I did one night, the cop sitting at the side of the road at the boundary between the two towns will pull the car over to check you out, giving as a reason something about your speed. As long as you're driving legally, he won't give you a ticket, but by then he's already made the point he's assigned there to make: people from Detroit aren't welcome in Grosse Pointe.

To understand why this is so, you have to know that the Detroit riots took place in 1968. This caused massive white flight to the suburbs, which changed the local ethnic composition from 75% white and 25% black and others to 80% black and others and 20% white, as Detroit's population shrank from 2,000,000 in 1968 to

975,000 in 1998. One of the economically devastating effects of this massive demographic shift was that Detroit became famous for its abandoned buildings. And many of them were big downtown buildings, like the Book Cadillac Hotel.

So when Borawski started organizing a Detroit Cacophony Society, he knew its location in one of the United States' premier decaying urban environments was a natural. He got the monthly newsletter going in June of 1998 (called *The Organ Grinder*—an ironic homage to the San Francisco Society newsletter's subtitle: *The Official Organ of the San Francisco Cacophony Society*). Even though its first event was an absinthe party, with participants wearing twentieth century Left Bank costumes, the Detroit organization seemed more like the old San Francisco Suicide Club than San Francisco Cacophony, because they did a lot more urban exploration, occasioned by the presence of some 8,500 abandoned buildings, all of them waiting to be explored. (Not to mention other abandoned infrastructures, such as railroad stations and tunnels, auto manufacturing plants, and salt mines.) For example, *The Organ Grinder* offered Urban Spelunking: *Each month we will be giving a guided tour of some of Detroit's bygone splendor*. Other popular events were pyrotechnic



Above: Looking east to Windsor, Canada.

Facing page: Images from Detroit Cacophony Expedition to the top of the Ambassador Bridge, an international crossing (Canada) and the only major suspension bridge in the United States with a huge neon sign at the top.

displays. A promising sounding July event, *Painting with Explosives*, failed to come off, when the guy with the warehouse space to stage it had last minute thoughts.

When I visited the Detroit Society several times in 1998 and 1999, we rappelled off a couple of downtown skyscrapers and explored several more. One of the buildings we got into was a 20 plus story hotel, that in spite of having been abandoned for over a decade, contained a large stash of unopened bottles of liquor and wines in a subbasement, which the local derelicts hadn't yet found. It seems there were just too many closed up buildings for even Detroit's homeless to explore.

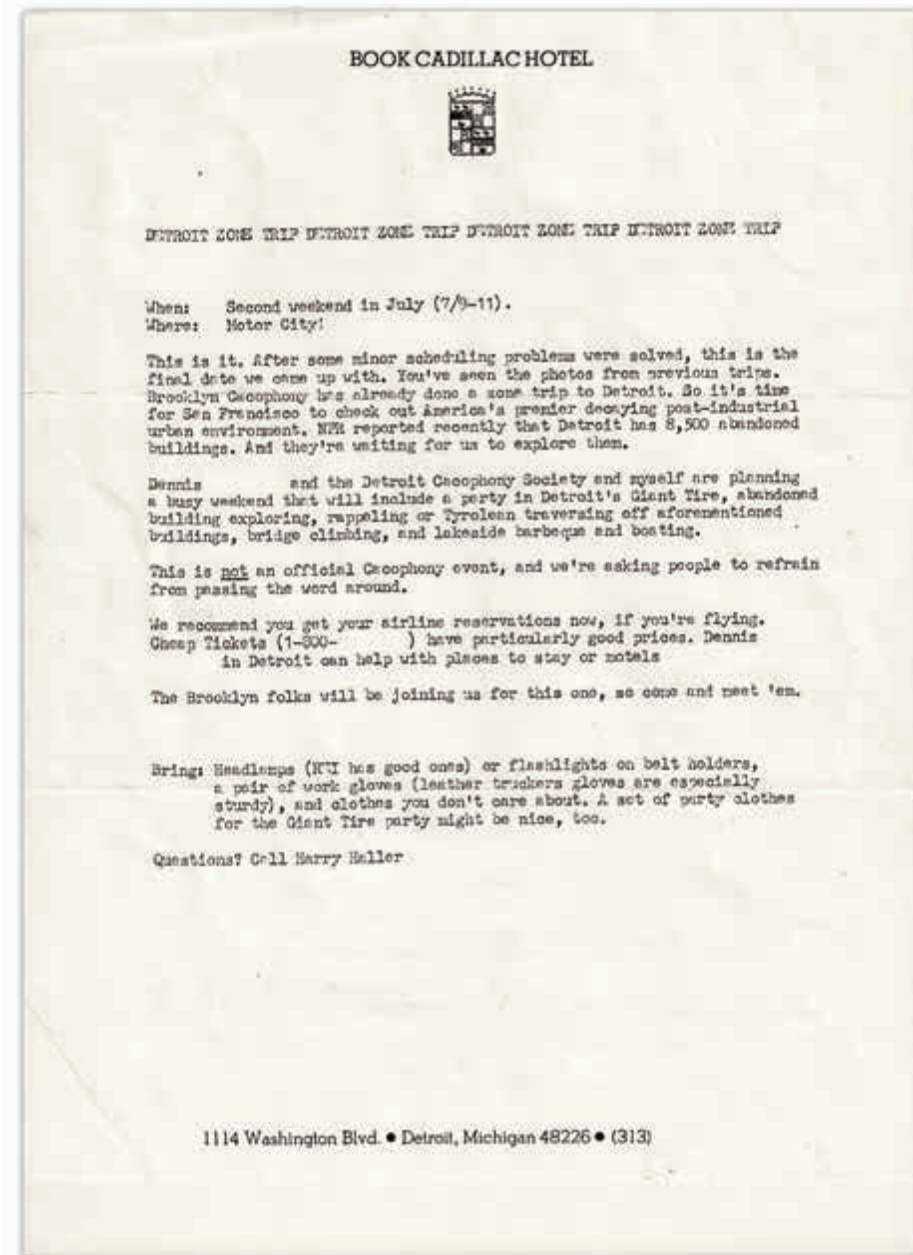
We also climbed the south tower of the Ambassador Bridge (a privately owned suspension bridge crossing the Detroit River into Canada) and had a party inside Detroit's famed Giant Tire one night, where, in true *Suicide Club* fashion, we talked the cops out of busting us. (We were less lucky in an abandoned tunnel belonging to the Grand Trunk Railroad, however.) The Detroit Cacophonists also climbed to the roof of one abandoned building—the Detroit Hilton—to watch the implosion of another abandoned building—Hudson's Department Store, a 25 story building occupying an entire square block that employed 12,000 people and served 100,000 shoppers a day, until it closed in 1983.

If you go there to visit, Borawski will take you places like the Cadieux Cafe, a Belgian restaurant and bar that has its own feather bowling court (called *kurlbollen* in Flemish), this being a bocce ball-like activity in which the

goal is to get as many cheese-wheel shaped balls as close to the feather stuck in the dirt at the far end of the court as possible. And the court isn't flat—its surface is curved, like a shallow trough. While only rarely played in Belgium any more, elderly Belgian-American men still live and die for feather bowling in the Cadieux Cafe, it being the only place in the United States where it is played.



Above: Stationery from zombie buildings provided a novel way of introducing these ghostly spaces to new Cacophony explorers, a habit Harry Haller picked up in the *Suicide Club*. It proved a popular method for communicating details of Cacophony events as well. Facing page: A group of Detroit, San Francisco, and Brooklyn Cacophony members exploring the rotting Book Cadillac Hotel in downtown Detroit and negotiating a Tyrolean traverse across roofs of the 30-plus story building. The same group explored a Detroit icon—the Giant Tire, rumored to have been constructed from the skeleton of an old Ferris wheel. Other Detroit events involved kayaking around Zug Island, the location of a steel plant; exploration of a street of abandoned single-family houses that a local artist and his volunteers turned into art projects as a defense against neighborhood crime; rappelling down the airshaft of a 20 story abandoned building; and pyrotechnics inside the abandoned Detroit train station.



**Urban Exploring in Detroit (How Not to Do It)**

The round metal cylinder hanging from the ceiling of the train tunnel appeared to be in excellent shape. The water-tight electrical conduit feeding it looked tight and the connection at the backside of the cylinder was clean, as was the entire receptacle. In other words, it really looked like a security camera that was in use. Thankfully it was pointing away from us; its viewing range was down the tunnel and toward Canada. It was the first camera we saw, and it got us wondering if we had passed other, perhaps better hidden, cameras—cameras that HAD seen us. Cameras that had also seen the long rifle and large propane canisters that we were carrying into an underground international border crossing. Maybe this exercise was not such a great idea after all...

Dennis Borawski, with the help of Karl Heiney, Julia Solis, Harry Haller, and others, had started up a Detroit

Cacophony Chapter recently. Hundreds of labyrinthine abandoned buildings made Detroit the richest environment for urban exploration in the US. It was a perfect city for a Cacophony outpost.

Dennis invented the pastime of propane shooting at Burning Man, during the 1993 desert event. Along with Stuart Mangrum, Robert Burk, and others, he fine-tuned the sport in succeeding years. Who knew initially that shooting a pressurized propane canister with a high powered rifle from a distance would not make the thing blow up, but would merely free it to skitter menacingly around, while venting the gaseous contents out the tiny bullet holes in its casing? Taping or tying a burning road flare to the canister did the trick as further tests would show, allowing the escaping gas to instantly ignite, creating a massive explosion. By the time Dennis moved back to his home town to start the local chapter in 1997, he had perfected the art of propane shooting and was leading expeditions into decaying edifices around town for the express purpose of filing the largest rooms he could find with fireballs.

There were several San Franciscans on the ill-fated Detroit-Windsor train tunnel affair. Most, like Dennis, were seasoned veterans of urban exploration. Some were old hands with firearms. All of them knew better than to undertake this particular endeavor, but it was Detroit! Devil's Night. The urban apocalypse. No cops. Anything goes.

The tunnel entrance was in the middle of a thoroughly desolate and largely abandoned industrial landscape. There were no occupied buildings nearby, just crumbling factories, weed-choked lots, and the burnt-out husks of long abandoned vehicles. After a long grade descent through a stained concrete trough, the double barrel tracks slipped entirely underground, about a mile east of the cavernous Michigan Central Train Station, the grand dame of American abandoned structures.

There were a lucky thirteen people on the event. First mistake: we parked several cars in a place no one should. Second mistake: we entered the tunnel planning to end up somewhere around midpoint between Detroit and Windsor, the United States and Canada. Dennis had vetted the tunnel, more or less, and figured we could shoot the propane canister directly under the international border, a hundred feet beneath the Detroit River. Third mistake: Chicken John and Silke informed us, after we were underground, that they needed to leave right then, in order to have enough time to wheel their rental car to Wisconsin for a meeting the next morning.

We had already walked a half mile and hadn't seen the entrance in a while. This was breaking a cardinal rule of UE and B-horror films: splitting up the group in a dark, unfamiliar and dangerous place. They were off to Dr. Evermore's Forevertron, the world's largest metal sculpture, and could not be persuaded to stay at least until we could all exit together – safety in numbers – in an hour or so, after perpetrating our ill advised endeavor. And so, against our better judgment, they turned around and walked off into the dark, heading back to the United States.

By the time Harry and I spotted the surveillance camera, we were so nervous that, after conferring with Julia, we decided that hurting Dennis's feelings was not nearly as bad an outset for the evening as going to jail for engineering an international incident involving large caliber rifles and armor piercing ammo. Dennis sheepishly acquiesced and I was elected to reconnoiter the tunnel entrance/exit we had so recently entered to insure the group's safety while exiting. Well, God protects the child, the drunk, and the fool. I tiptoed closer to the dim light of the entrance. Sure enough, a filmy wash of red and blue lights flashed dully off the dirty tunnel walls. What were clearly muffled police radio calls echoed off the concrete all around. I crept out silently, a shadow among shadows. There was a worn concrete stair just at the opening. I crept up the stair, eventually peering through a chink in the wall out into the train yard. Silke and Chicken were sitting in the dirt, hands cuffed behind. I could just make out the rear end of a white police sedan. I could not tell if there were more.

I bolted silently back down the stair, into the tunnel, and back toward Canada. After rejoining the group, Harry and I insisted we ditch both the rifle and propane canister as best we could. Then we wrangled the group, as silently as we were able, to within a hundred feet of the entrance. This served the dual purpose of putting some distance between us and the now fingerprint-less contraband and

**PAPER OR PLASTIC?**

**THE EX CATHEDRA ENIGMA OF THE RENO CACOPHONY SOCIETY**

afternoon's activities will consist of croquet-in-coriolis, with trophies given to the winner of the match, followed by high tea. This is an excellent opportunity to raise that old society chestnut: no white shoes after Labor Day!

When: Saturday, November 15, 1996 @ 2:00 p.m.  
Where: The empty lot at the corner of Sierra and First Street, Downtown Reno  
Bring: Gin and Tonic or other appropriately British beverages, but no, please, no ice cream and wassail sandwiches — don't forget to remove the crusts, scones, tarts, etc.), croquet with blue, proper lawn attire (white socks for the ladies, goggles and caps for the gentlemen)  
Contact: Miss Cynthia Perewick, 900/

**WHAT'S ALL THE NOISE ABOUT?**  
Come find out for yourself! It's the monthly meeting of the Reno Cacophony Society. We will be planning upcoming events, trading war stories and generally making a racket. For the board and beautiful of the Thriller Meadows.  
When: Tuesday, November 19, 1996 @ 7:30 p.m.  
Where: Area 51, 1483 E. 4th Street at 4th Street, Reno  
Bring: At least 10 ideas for events (yes, we're giving you homework), money for beverages  
Contact: Miss Cynthia Perewick, 900/

**POLITICALLY INCORRECT**  
Are you, like the rest of us, tired of giving up political signs for Democrats and Republicans? Do you crave a third party, something to upset the political process a tad (and we're not talking those parties)? The Cacophony Society has decided to run their own candidate for local office (that we're not telling what or where). Two of our members are getting up some campaign signs to publicize this illustrious addition to the Reno political fray. Help us spread the word by placing signs throughout the Reno-Sparks area. After we have gotten the word out, we will reconvene at a local tavern to deal with the election in the most logical of manners, with alcohol.

When: Sunday, November 3, 1996 @ 6:30 p.m.  
Where: Meet in the parking lot behind the Blue Heron (Virginia at Vassar)  
Bring: Single games, tops, flashlights, cash for cocktails  
Wear: Dark clothing, low-heeled shoes

**MEND THY WICKET WAYS**  
An empty lot in the middle of town is to a Cacophony member a far different lot to a poacher. The City Council is talking about building an ice-skating rink on the corner of First and Sierra, but at the moment it sits empty, waiting for a good old-fashioned...croquet match. In between like Florida or Great Britain, croquet is a lawn game. Here in Nevada, the only place to play is in the sand. This does not, however, give us license to be any less civilized or mannered in our market wanking. The Cacophony Society is a loose organization of individuals dedicated to promoting sacred croquet. We are the Arch in society's get-a-long, the bar under the middle and the rotten timber holding up the establish-ment upon which. We are the boarder dice on the empty sheet of life. You may already be a member!

being close enough to the entrance to be able to exit en masse, should it become apparent that the police were preparing to sweep the tunnel. We figured we could convince them that we were just exploring the tunnel and, assuming no cameras had picked up our highly illegal props, head off any deeper prying into the tunnel's depths by the authorities. We had no idea what the two arrestees were telling their captor(s) but knew that even the stupidest cop would be certain there were others, simply due to the surplus of vehicles parked together in the dumb place (see First mistake).

By now, one of the Detroit explorers unfamiliar to us had started hyperventilating, and Fourth mistake: it became clear she had probably ingested some kind of mind-altering drug, prior to embarking on our adventure. Harry, who was a talented mental health professional, spent some focused energy on calming the sweating, squirming, and generally agitated party girl down.

It had now been some time since we had regrouped near the tunnel entrance, and there was no sign of any impending V-formation swat team sweep heading our way. We decided to calmly exit together in a relaxed group saunter, ready to expound upon the architectural and historic importance of the decaying railway infrastructure all around us, hopefully to the confusion and placation of any peace officers we encountered.

**THE ORGAN GRINDER**  
October 1998

**CACOPHONY MEETING**  
Thursday, October 29th, 7PM  
Honest John's Bar and No Grill, Jefferson Avenue near Belle Isle  
Relive old performances, discuss burning man adventures, plot new extravaganzas, and pickle your funny bone. Try out new routines, laugh r wally loud and make bystanders nervous. Propane event to follow meeting.

**REVEREND OO BUCK, PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE PROPANE PYROMANIACS IS HOLDING SERVICE**  
Thursday, October 29th, 9 PM  
Honest John's, Jefferson Avenue near Belle Isle  
The congregation will meet at Honest John's and caravan to an undisclosed spot for a good, old-fashioned tank letting. This event is not for the faint of heart or those easily disturbed. Love for a good pyrotechnic display is a must.

**URBAN SPELUNKING**  
Kentucky has its Mammoth Caves, Louisiana has its swamps, Florida has Everglades. Well... Detroit has its abandoned buildings. Each month we will be giving a guided tour of some of Detroit's bygone splendor. **This event is not a cake walk**, there are things you will need. You **MUST** bring a flashlight with new batteries, good walking shoes, rubber soles are preferred. Long sleeve shirts, and jeans are strongly suggested.

WHEN: Thursday, November 5th, 7:30 PM  
WHERE: Meet at Lindell AC (1310 Cass)  
HOST: The Urban Mountaineer

**FUTURE EVENTS**  
Amidst our group we have access to an actual military tank and we are looking for a running car or anything suitable for a tank crushing. If you have a donation for the crush, please contact The General at (313) -Tanks!

**Subscribe** Cure yourself of the gnawing pangs of boredom and rid yourself of the benign tumor of stagnation with a twelve month subscription to **The Organ Grinder**, the social calendar and swollen larynx of the Cacophony Society. Each issue, painstakingly crafted by other society members comes to you in a startling, one-of-a-kind envelope which may include: other informative

**Do you have any ideas for future events or meetings?**

Please E-mail: [Cacophony5@aol.com](mailto:Cacophony5@aol.com) or write to: P.O. Box 98 Ferndale, MI 48220

better yet, bring yer butt down to the meeting on October 29th at Honest John's. These things don't just happen ya know! Come on down and enjoy the splendor that is the Kress Lounge - we'll sip cool refreshing adult beverages, listen to some great jukebox tunes and **brainstorm new event ideas!**

Above: Detroit Cacophony newsletter featuring weapons and abandoned buildings.

Above: A newsletter of the short-lived Reno Cacophony Society.

There was one cop. He was a Railroad Special Officer. Rather he was THE Railroad Special Officer: the only one for the entire district – an area almost fifty miles across. He stumbled upon our insufficiently hidden cars entirely by chance. He had written Chicken and Silke up for trespassing on RR property and had already released them, when the mass of us exited the tunnel. Not having any more handcuffs, he allowed us to mill cooperatively about as he dug his citation booklet back out of his briefcase. He only had five numbered tickets left in the booklet. There were eleven un-cited malefactors left. Being a fair man, he chose to not write any more tickets, rather than being compelled to pick which of us were most deserving, or calling for back-up from his HQ and hauling us all in. Like a lone Texas Ranger out on the trackless Guadalupe Range, he was the only Law on the tracks for miles around, and consequently he had a lot of latitude in how he chose to enforce the law. By this time Harry and I were cracking jokes with him and telling stories about exploring the urban wilds of California and New York. He cut us loose, with the warning to steer clear of railroad property or, even though we weren't such terrible desperadoes, he would have to run us in. Chicken and Silke remained the only cited criminals of the evening, paying their court ordered restitution of a hundred dollars apiece some months later.



**DETROIT WAS ALL PAST. GREAT RUINS. CHEAP.**

Chicken John Rinaldi

Sure. Fly to Detroit, meet the Cacophonists from there. Go on an adventure.

I had no idea what the event was. We were 20 minutes down the tunnel before I saw the big propane tank. Then I noticed what had to be a soft case for a rifle. They were gonna shoot the propane tank in the train tunnel. I stopped in my tracks. I don't do guns, period. This wasn't a good idea. Period. I made some excuse, Silke and I turned around and walked back to the entrance. With no flashlight. It was amazing. Pitch dark. We walked and stumbled and giggled.

The light exploded in our eyes. The police officer commanded us to put our hands on our heads, and then cuffed us. With his light, he walked us out of the tunnel. "What the hell are you doing down here?" A simple question. Reasonable. I could see it all clearly now. Six cars in the parking lot of the abandoned train station, the open tunnel the only place we could be.

I just started talking:

"We are architecture enthusiasts that met in a chat room on the Internet, and decided to come from all over the country and visit this tunnel. It has the last remaining example of Flemish Buttresses in the U.S. It's really quite



Above: A Detroit icon, the giant Uniroyal Tire, alongside Interstate 94 near the Detroit International Airport, was rumored to have been constructed from the skeleton of an old Ferris Wheel. An elaborate event was planned for this structure but was cut short by the police. Evidently, a young Detroit Cacophonist left his newsletter announcing the event on his parent's living room table, causing his mother to call the police to inquire about the legality of such an endeavor and the nature of the weird cult sponsoring it. Facing page: Inside the tire.

fascinating; this whole railway station was designed by Ronald G. Hirshman and is a marvel of engineering. "

I imagined that I had a certain amount of time before the idiots in the tunnel pierced the mild steel of the pressurized tank with an armor piercing round which would certainly spark and ignite the volatile mass compressed into that tiny tank. A thunderous boom and ball of flame would follow. And if the prosecuting attorney for the railroad was to get lucky, he would find that a slight misspelling of my name would reveal a felony tax evasion charge from NY state and a drug trafficking charge from Connecticut. Which would mean that this stunt would be my 3rd felony strike. There it is.

I bet his gun was loaded. Could I somehow grab the gun? Right when the explosion occurred, he would be stunned, that would be my chance. With my back to him, I would somehow get the gun, keep him at bay. Drive off in my car. Run. Hide. Live in the woods. Alaska. Fishing. Plastic surgery. Hollow tooth with a cyanide capsule...

My face was calm. Chatting with the officer about what a great city Detroit was in its day. He wrote us tickets for trespassing. Told us that the neighborhood we were in was horrible, and that we should be careful. And let us go.

As I drove away, elated that they had either not shot the thing yet or had changed their minds, I reflected on what Cacophony is and what it is not. And decided that

this kind of thinking is based in fear. Fear in the form of expectation.

The only regret I have surrounding Cacophony is a simple one: the regret that had I not been blessed to fall in with these idiots, I would have never properly understood regret. Period. That, and I wouldn't have had the myriad of experiences that have made me into the person I am today...

The Circus Redickulous was a Cacophony Event. Sure it was. Hundreds of gigs over 5 years across the country, doing shows in the most bizarre venues I could find with 'no content' as the content. As many as 40 people traveling with no budget, no talent, and no complaining.

If I could explain to you what happened, I would be a very talented writer indeed. You are in no danger of that happening. We once did a show for one single person. Twenty of us. In Atlanta, Georgia. He left 15 minutes into the show.

There it is.

So the Cacophony crew from SF went to Detroit, and the Detroit guys wanted to do some Midwest Cacophony. No shock that it involved a gun. We came to give them some juice. We would have gone to any city that started a Cacophony Chapter who asked. We were looking for allies. Compatriots. Equals. People were having a hard time keeping up with us.



**A VIGIL FOR CACOPHONY**

Julia Solis

Many, many tears were shed for Jimmy the Beard.

Some years ago in a San Francisco nightclub, a man named Jimmy the Beard was frolicking with his stripper girlfriend atop a trick piano, when its lift mechanism went off, crushing him against the ceiling. According to the police, the screaming stripper was too intoxicated to remember how she ended up pinned between a piano and a quickly cooling corpse. But one thing was clear—Jimmy's body heroically provided the cushion that saved her life.

Luckily for Jimmy, we decided that his good deed should not be forgotten. In October 2006, the Cacophony Society's 20-year anniversary was coming up, and the crews behind Dark Passage and the Madagascar Institute – two groups that grew out of Brooklyn Cacophony – were ready to celebrate. Chad Mulligan wanted to involve a suspended piano in the San Francisco festivities. How would we match this in New York? When our collaborator Kim Couchot remembered Jimmy, the answer became obvious.

We would honor this anniversary with a candlelight vigil for Jimmy the Beard. The setting: Union Square Park at night. The plan: tables covered with elegant white linen and candles, a large commemorative poster on a stand for Jimmy (the first photo we found in a Google image search for "beard"), pamphlets telling his life and death story, some cake and champagne. During our solemn

celebration, a posse of clowns would arrive and set up a toy piano next to us, played by Caution Mike. The mourners would get outraged at the clowns: "Can't you see we're grieving for our Jimmy who was killed by a piano?" John Law (mourner) would wrestle Caution Mike (clown) to the ground, followed by a massive pie fight. So far so good.

For a moment, everything was actually going as planned. The tables were set up, filling the walkways inside the park with beautiful candlelight. Ed Snible had crafted a thoughtful *memento mori* of a naked Barbie doll spread-eagled on a tiny piano. The mourners in fancy funeral attire were answering questions and handing out pamphlets to passersby. Mothers and children, drawn by the pretty lights, expressed their condolences in hushed tones. The clowns entered, and then things went horribly wrong.

What we hadn't counted on were the skate punks. A group of unsuspecting guys on skateboards were watching Caution Mike set up a toy piano next to the mourners. They weren't just outraged, they were ready to defend the mourners with their fists. We couldn't believe our luck at this turn of events. The skate punks shouted, the clowns yelled back. John Law, dressed in a handsome black suit and robbed of his role, decided to wrestle the piano player anyway, as one of the punks bashed a clown with his board. The pies came out. Whipped cream and shaving cream softened the sounds of skateboards



Above: Harrod Blank and Melmoth with the Manhattan skyline as a backdrop.

Facing page: A view of Brooklyn from atop the tower of the Manhattan Bridge over the East River. The first ascents of New York's major spans were by the Suicide Club in the late '70s. This excursion took place in late 1996, during a NYC visit for a Burning Man exhibition at CBGB's Gallery on Bowery.

smacking against skulls. Mothers and children stood back, sobbing. By now, reports were coming in from all sides that cops were surrounding the park. And as we all know, if there's one thing New York is good at, it's having cops ensnare an unruly crowd.

We immediately began our exodus, but it was too late; the cops were already waiting for us on Park Avenue. Luckily, we were saved by a diversion. Thanks John! Fresh from the fight, John busted out of the park and past the cops, who yelled at him to stop. Holding on to his fedora, he darted straight into traffic, as the cops gave chase. I couldn't believe what he was doing – covered head to toe in cream pies, he was running into bustling New York traffic to escape a group of angry cops. Drivers slammed on their brakes as he jumped over street dividers and ran down 16th Street, where more police were closing in. This would have been much more entertaining if John and I didn't have a date to go wading through the Pope's

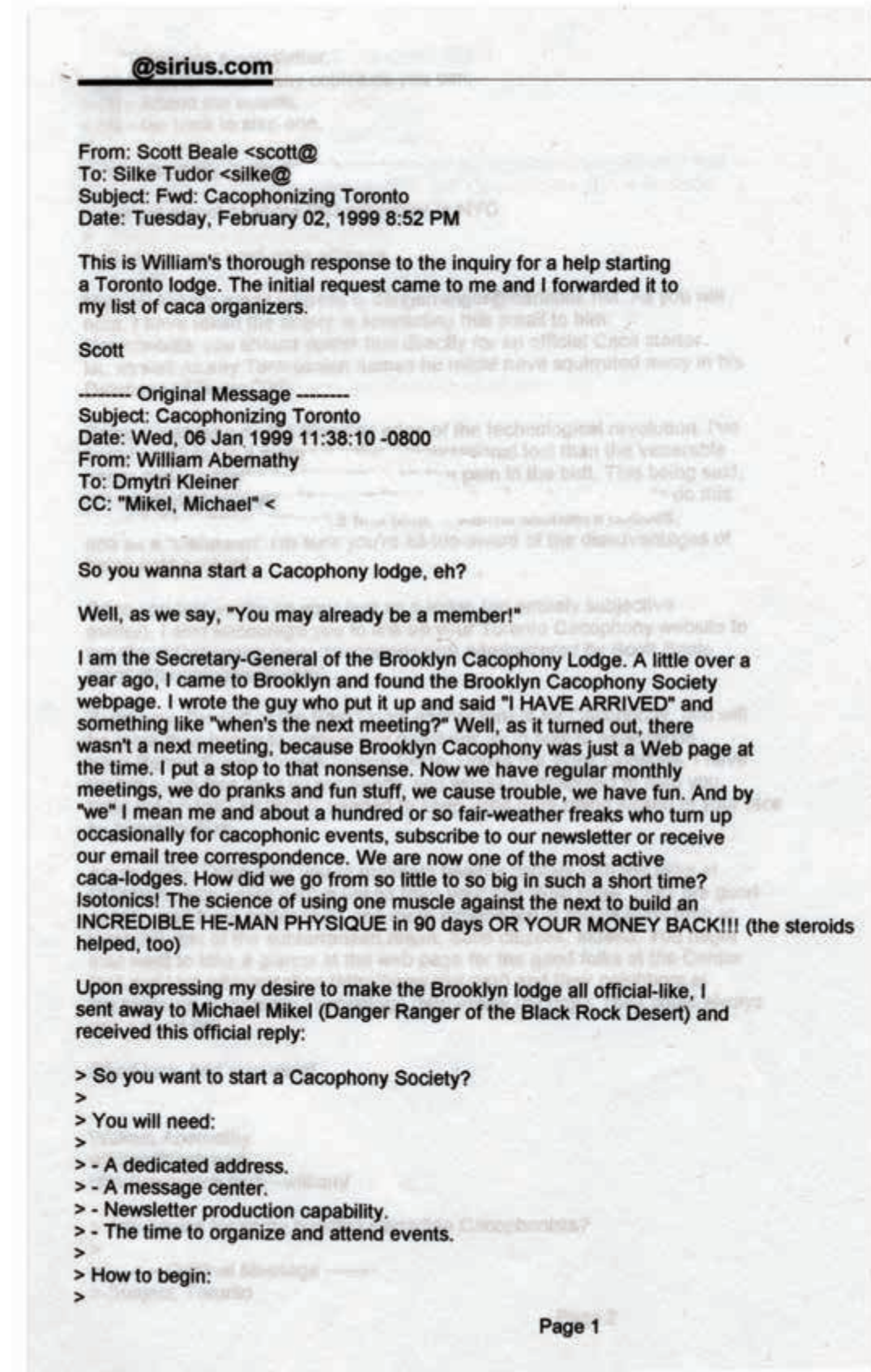
poop in the Cloaca Maxima sewers of Rome, and had to catch a plane in the morning. I began grieving in earnest as I watched him get handcuffed and taken away. Oh well, I'd just have to send him a postcard of a floating piece of shit from Rome.

Everyone assembled in a bar trying to get news of John. A few hours later he walked laughing through the door. He had told the police the truth – he was mourning the victim of a tragic accident when he was attacked and had to defend himself, and when he ran out, confused by the bright traffic lights, he was simply trying to get away from the clowns.

As we drove home in a cab, the park looked peaceful and deserted, except for the large poster of Jimmy, which miraculously was still standing, commemorating what is surely our favorite tragedy involving strippers, pianos, and beards.



Above: Pioneering sexologist Ducky Doolittle settled in NYC after touring the country with the Circus Redickulless. Ducky, known at the time for her popular pie-sitting fetish, did her best to spread the joy of Cacophony through the boroughs. Facing page: Part of an e-mail exchange about the starting of a Cacophony lodge in Toronto, 1999. Brooklyn Cacophony founder and Burning Man militia leader William Abernathy weighs in.







## Cacophony 2.0 and Fellow Travelers

“There is no underground anymore. What would ‘underground’ mean now anyway, ‘underexposed?’”  
— Scott Beale, Laughing Squid

### Fellow Travelers

*Terrified movie goers tumbled out of the Roxie Theater, certain that they had just experienced a massive earthquake. Outside, in the middle of 16th Street, they found a V-1 rocket engine mounted on a flatbed truck and spouting a death ray of flame. Survival Research Labs’ founder Mark Pauline had just decided to stage an impromptu performance of one of his creations. What sounded like a mechanized tank assault on the Eastern Front sidetracked officers from a nearby undercover drug surveillance; confused and uncertain how to proceed, they escorted Pauline and his contraption to the Mission District’s police station.*

*The Lieutenant on watch, not knowing what to make of the massive metal cylinder mounted on the truck and misunderstanding or simply not believing the officers (who by now had discretely fled the area) description of what the thing did, said to Pauline: “Well, show me what it does.” Grinning, Pauline wound up the massive jet engine, while John Law, Karen Marcelo, Violet Blue and others made sure no other cars were coming. Ten thousand decibels of painful noise and 50 feet of flame shot across 18th Street.*

*No one could hear what the cop was saying, as he leaped up and down, red-faced, and obviously shouting at the top of his lungs. But they could read his lips: “TURN IT OFF! TURN IT OFF!” Pauline obliged. Explaining to his superiors that he had allowed such a thing on a busy commercial street was clearly*

*going to cost him. All he could say was, “Get that fucking thing OUT OF MY PRECINCT! And NEVER come back!”*



Cacophony had many fellow travelers and co-conspirators over the years and worked well with all sorts of other creative cabals. Hippy era groups like the Diggers and the Merry Pranksters were local heroes to many in Cacophony. Early '70s art and performance ensembles, like the Cockettes and Ant Farm, shared a sense of absurd gaiety with the soon to emerge Cacophony. *Rough Draft*, in addition to direct Cacophony event listings, provided (in many issues) a “Sounds Like Cacophony” section, where that month’s editor would include write-ups about events prepared and executed by other, sometimes related, groups, individuals, or organizations. Some of these groups had members in common with Cacophony, and others may only have inspired the interest of that month’s editor, through some parallel sensibility or

more obscure connection.

Sister Kitty Catalyst and Sister Dana, primary ‘nuns’ in the protean gay activist/pranks group, Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, were frequent editors of *Rough Draft* and cross over event organizers. Jack Napier and Irving Gliikk, cofounders of the Billboard Liberation Front, and Simon Wagstaffe, the first press agent of the world’s longest running and best known billboard alteration crew, were (reputedly) all

Above: Brody Culpepper at a Big Rig Industries desert training exercise at an undisclosed location.  
Facing page: A dream that someone in NYC Urban Exploration cabal Dark Passage might have had in 2001, somewhere on the Eastern Seaboard.

involved in Cacophony under different names and at different times.

The Chinese New Year's Treasure Hunt, which takes place during the world-famous Chinese New Year's Parade through Chinatown every February, began as a Suicide Club event in 1977. For over ten years, it was hosted by Cacophony. This annual event sent teams of competitors tearing through the massively crowded, narrow streets of the district at a time when passage could hardly be more obscured.

Cacophony agents occasionally co-hosted events with artists and genuine art ensembles. In the case of Kill your TV, Cacophony provided a template and a huge wasteland set for the tribal/industrial noise group, Sharkbait, and machine art cabals Survival Research Labs, SEEMEN, and PeopleHater, to unleash their peculiar brands of mayhem in a collaborative fashion not typical of their standard performances. PeopleHater also collaborated in the Car Hunt event on a small, very desolate playa in Northern Nevada, not far from the Great Playa of the Black Rock Desert.

Sculptor Brian Goggin recruited Cacophony in the creation of San Francisco's preeminent site-specific sculpture, *Defenestration*. Local art and performance groups banded together to assist Goggin in his whimsical installation, which transformed an abandoned five story residential hotel into the state's largest sculpture. This was a task that was ideally suited to the one-for-all, all-for-one philosophy that Cacophony espoused.

Other fellow travelers would include the mail-art, prank religion, Church of the Subgenius, proto Burning Man primal-art experiment, Desert Site Works, "nerd rock" band and surreal performance group, Three Day Stubble, Mission District Art Walk audience-as-performance event, Space Walk, the world's first snack-food religion, The First Church of the Last Laugh and its attendant April 1st religious outing, the St. Stupid's Day Parade, and many, many, more absurd collectives, pseudo-religions, cult pranks, and the like.

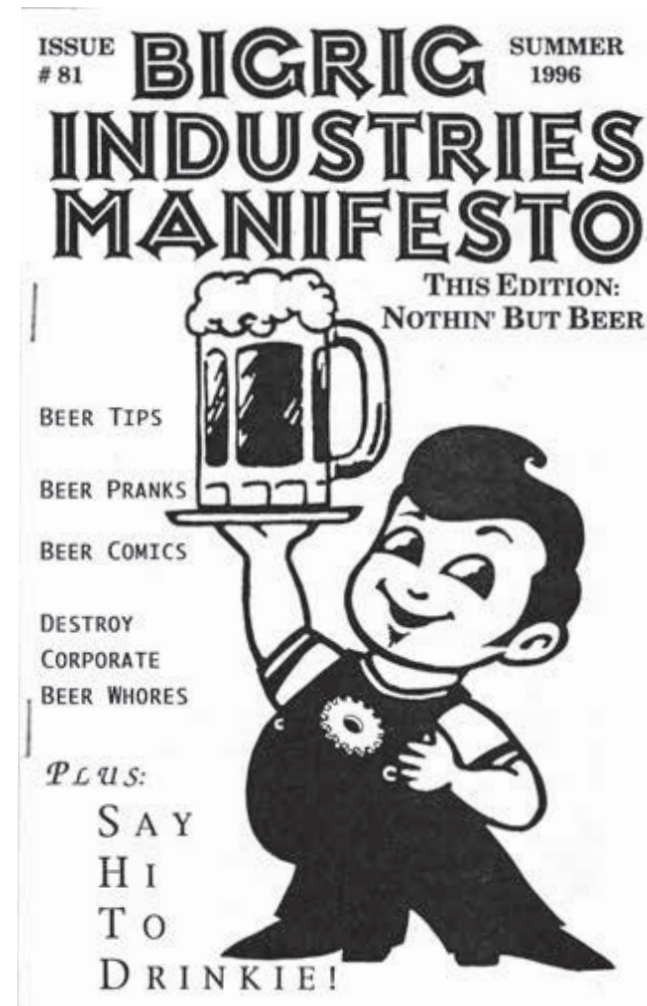
**Cacophony 2.0**

*Everyone in San Francisco knows Frank Chu. Well, maybe they don't know him but they know who he is. They know him in much the same way their San Francisco forbearers knew Emperor Norton, because, like Norton, Frank Chu is out on the streets of San Francisco every day, rain or shine, at every media event that takes place in the city. If there's a news camera or a skinny writer with a notepad, Frank's there, holding his ubiquitous 12 Galaxies sign high for all to see, with its cryptic, vaguely threatening messages to Bill Clinton, alien civilizations, and multifarious other cosmic malefactors.*

*Frank Chu is the inheritor of the good Emperor's mantle as the best known and loved street eccentric in San Francisco of his time. During the waning days of the last millennium, he started showing up everywhere: Civic Center, the Ferry Building, the Federal Office Building, Union Square, and every other place of historic and current news interest.*

*The newest members of Cacophony were the first to realize Frank's place in the local pantheon and to memorialize his tireless service to the general public. Cacophony 2.0 facilitators Dave Calkins, Rick Abruzzo, Sandwichgirl, and others passed the hat, and presented Frank Chu with a certificate of eternal appreciation and a brand new pair of stylish and durable Rockport walking shoes.*

*The ceremony took place at the Powell St. Cable Car turnaround and was attended by the crème de la crème of San Francisco Society (OK, really just Cacophony members, captive tourists, street people, and writers from the weeklies). Soon after that presentation, Frank's inscrutable primary message, "12 Galaxies," was adopted as the name of a hip Mission District club where Frank drank for free.*



Above: Before the instant access of the Internet, zines were an important method of recording group experiences and sharing ideas for the creation of new events. Big Rig Industries had a proclivity for guns, beer, and arcane science when it came to their events.

This new generation of Cacophonists took the underlying philosophy of no leaders, no dogma, and no direction to heart. The burgeoning world of online communication eventually became the new and primary conduit for organizing events. Cacophony had relied on the *Rough Draft* mailer for primary dissemination of information and listing of events since its premier in 1986, but that was all to change soon enough.

The soon to be worldwide mob scenes— innumerable Santa events, Bride, Zombie, clown, or pillow fight events, The Urban Iditarod, Urban Golf, and other urban prank events— were, for better or worse, driven by the growing Internet flash mob social networking phenomenon. All were to some degree foreshadowed by the coffee-house and U.S. Postal Service distributed *Rough Draft*, with its monthly subversive sampling of Cacophonous happenings.

**Cacophony Online**

In 1995, Richard Peterson started the first Cacophony web site on Zpub. At the time, most Cacophonists had no idea what a website actually was or what Internet access was to portend.

Around the same time, nascent filmmaker and Ohio transplant Scott Beale started videotaping many Cacophony events and providing the organizers with

VHS copies. Most organizers were too scattered to coordinate filming of their own events and too poor to pay anyone to do it, so Scott very quickly ingratiated himself into the core of Cacophony central, even though he wasn't actively creating events at that time. Having a clear video of the last night's explosion, fluid rich prank, or costumed assault on civic decency (or whatever event you organized) was the icing on the cake. Unlike the earlier Suicide Club, Cacophony was not averse to press interest or careful recording of the group's exploits, and so the videotaping of many of the events became a regular occurrence. Doug Wellman and Chuck Cirino were two shooters who, along with Scott, shot many of the mid-period Cacophony happenings.

In addition to video production, Scott Beale was nurturing an interest in, and expanding his knowledge of, the rapidly expanding World Wide Web. Scott and others began encouraging their fellow Cacophonists to create their own websites and also started to explore various methods of getting the word out about the any and confusing events and pranks Cacophony was hosting and/or inspiring. By 1998, Cacophony 2.0 had emerged, and they were creating most of the new events and, taking a cue from Scott Beale and his website Laughing Squid, driving Cacophony in some new directions using the tools of the emerging online media.



Events like the Pigeon Roast in Union Square (along side a PETA pro-animal political protest) and the staging of a Republican political rally in the heart of Berkeley “free speech” territory, People’s Park, started getting the 2.0 kids in lots of entertaining trouble. With no one leader or target for the animal and “free speech” lovers to assault, they were able to play with ideas of what free really means, with less of a chance of getting a black eye. Many of the 2.0 organizers were instrumental in the emerging flash mob and Internet crowd sourcing events of the early ‘oughts. Cacophony, with the Santa Rampage (*Santarchy*, *SantaCon*) and later *Brides of March*, *Zombie* and *Clown* mob happenings, helped reinvent street communication through collective, impromptu street performance. In the beginning of Cacophony’s history, the call to action through the mail and printed tracts reached a limited number of people. By the late ‘90s and early ‘00s, events were disseminated through online means and reached a wider audience. Eventually, the very mechanism that spread the ideas and prank potential of Cacophony spelled the end of a need for any actual Cacophony organization.



**Culture Jamming**  
**San Francisco’s new pranksters: The subversive laughter of the next generation**

*The San Francisco Bay Guardian*  
 January 11-17, 1995 Vol. 29, No. 15  
 Brad Wieners  
*Culture Jammers*  
*From Shark Bait to the BLF, San Francisco is still the nation’s prankster capital.*

San Francisco is one of those rare psycho-geographical places that naturally attracts people prone to the unusual and the outrageous. Thus the Bay Area has a long tradition of using the public prank to rattle the cage of consensus reality— as a vehicle for cultural or political statements, for anarchistic self-expression, or just for freaking people out. Over the years, various groups and individuals— some anonymous, others with pseudonyms, since many pranks involve trespassing and occasionally defacing or destroying public and private property— have made their way into local legend and even the international performance art scene by staging pranks that run from the ludicrous to the downright dangerous.

Mark Pauline is the essential prankster. Pauline, who founded Survival Research Labs in 1979 with partners Matt Heckert and Eric Werner, inspired a whole generation of pranksters. SRL events feature machines, built from scavenged parts, that fight each other and often explode. When Pauline and his crew aim one of their hallmark diesel-flame cannons at a diorama of *The Last Supper* or a pyramid of TVs, being there takes on new meaning.

Along with Pauline, the activities of Jack Napier of the Billboard Liberation Front (BLF) and the principals of the Cacophony Society (“You may already be a member”) have guaranteed the Bay Area a healthy minimum of media mischief and freelance anarchy.

And now they have company. The late ‘80s and early ‘90s have shown that the spirit of pranking is alive and well and living in the Bay Area. New members have shored up the ranks of the BLF and the Cacophony Society, while newcomer pranksters have launched their own rebel enterprises. Some see themselves as carrying on a vaunted San Francisco tradition; others believe they are participating in a new phase of activism called “culture jamming,” still others eschew historical references or vogue labels of any sort.

What the following Bay Area pranksters do share is a sense of urgency— that the Republicans or television or toxic corporations have too much power and must be neutralized through subversive laughter.

This page: Illustration for *Laughing Squid* by Kevin Evans.

**Shark Bait**

Whether you call Shark Bait a “band” or “entertainers” depends on your encounter with them. Shark Bait makes techno-industrial noise or, as one reviewer put it, “high-speed titanic minimalism.” But they are best known for getting others— their audience— to make their own noise. The group’s love of chaos led them to create “crushfests,” where audience members are given drum sticks, corrugated roofing, car fenders, and other junk to generate a massive and deafening percussion section, and their signature “crush cage,” in which audience members can don a motorcycle helmet and gloves to safely, but dramatically, beat the hell out of an old television.

The crush cage has become so popular (it was featured at Lollapalooza and Kill Your TV, an event sponsored by the Cacophony Society last October) that Shark Bait is trying to copyright the idea.

Member Chris Taylor reports that, at present, Shark Bait is anchored by himself, the fire breathing Mr. Clean, and Chicken, the central sonic manipulator. Though they plan to produce and record an album this year and embark on a national tour, Taylor emphasizes the improvised aspects of their work.

“The destructiveness came from our shows,” Taylor says. “People were always beating on our stage and slamming, so we decided to give them something more to beat on.”

Pretty soon we were bringing truckloads of metal to our shows.”

Though the mayhem at their shows often proves cathartic for Shark Bait crowds, it hasn’t exactly helped to get the band gigs. A few San Francisco club and warehouse owners have lived to regret the day they told Shark Bait to thrash away, because of collateral damage. For the same reason, some bands have also shunned the group, refusing to play at the same gig with them.

One of Taylor’s favorite Shark Bait pranks involved a headlining band that had Shark Bait cut from the bill of a San Francisco club more than a year ago. The techno-industrial band Front Line Assembly was playing to a prerecorded digital sound track and had no choice but to continue when streaming fish parts (launched from the audience by Shark Bait) rained down on them. Taylor said that to get the fish guts hot, they were put in Ziplock bags and then submerged in boiling water. “It was kind of childish,” Taylor admits, “but they had gone out of their way to fuck us.”

Shark Bait performed a crushfest at the 1994 Burning Man festival, a spontaneous performance festival held each Labor Day weekend in Black Rock Desert, NV, that ends in a ritual pyre. Taylor says that he’s encouraged by the “odd synchronicity” occurring right now among various prankster counterculture groups. “It’s funny.



Above: Brian Goggin and Catherine Morgan installing a bed seemingly AWOL from a Lewis Carroll tale on the side of the Defenestration building.

We've been doing this for eight years... but these kind of collaborative events are really what we've always been about."

**Timothy Liddy**

It's true. Timothy Liddy does exist, and so do his plans to turn Oakland's Eastmont Mall into a prison (he's already appropriated Alameda County stationery for the press blitz) and to send a large group of U.S. nationals across the Mexico-United States border (south to north) in loud golf clothes.

As his *nom de guerre* suggests, Timothy Liddy, 36, embodies, as he says, a "philosophical mix of [hippy

pilgrimage south of Tijuana before they make the run for the border. The golf clothes, he explains, will be part of the group's alibi if they get accosted by border guards. "We'll tell them we're looking for a Titleist. I think it'll be plausible. What do you think?"

**Billboard Liberation Front**

The 18-year old Billboard Liberation Front is about to strike again. So promises L.L. Fauntleroy, 25, a BLF operative, part of a new youth movement on the old front.

The group is best known for its how-to pamphlet on midnight billboard editing and its New Year's Eve 1990 hit above the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge approach,

**Taylor says that he's encouraged by the "odd synchronicity" occurring right now among various prankster counterculture groups. "It's funny. We've been doing this for eight years... but these kind of collaborative events are really what we've always been about."**

spokesbrain] Timothy Leary and [Nixon henchman and radio jock] G. Gordon Liddy."

The man behind this unusual persona claims to have been the first person ever to streak on the campus of the University of California at Irvine. He says he first broke the law at age 15, embarking on a short-lived career of juvenile crime. "Once you start playing it straight, you just can't stop," he says. "I went in search of the American dream and now I own it, and I'm determined to make sure no one else can have it."

Of his plans for Eastmont Liddy says, "If you haven't gone, go. But go armed. See, it already has security, a watchtower, and a police station on the premises—with a holding cell—[so] we won't be breaking any new ground. What we're talking about is recycling." Liddy says that he and his supporters will present their idea early this year to the Alameda County Planning Commission during one of its televised meetings.

Liddy says the planned border crossing will require dozens of prankster-participants to run 700 yards from Mexico to reach the United States. Sometime early this year a bus will take the volunteer immigrants on a

where BLF pranksters altered a Harrah's Tahoe billboard to read, "America. Everywhere: AIDS, Crack, Homeless; The White: Don't Worry, Be Happy."

More recently, last April in fact, the BLF retaliated when an ad agency appropriated its mode of expression in a campaign aimed at young-adult car buyers, in which the agency spray painted its own billboard. The original boards read "Hi" and were later changed by the agency to "Hip" or "Chill." The BLF improved the agency's "Hip" to "Hype," and placed a skull and crossbones on the car's grille for good measure.

A few weeks later, when the image of the Mona Lisa used to sell Zenith televisions on billboards, BLF immediately whited out her eyes and branded her with the sign of the beast. "I always thought it was creepy when you'd find the eyes whited out in textbooks," Fauntleroy explains.

Fauntleroy and the BLF look down on the people who merely vandalize billboards by defacing them with paint balloons. They argue that the goal of midnight billboard editors should be to leave the board unharmed, so that folks think more about the message than the property damage.

Like all BLFers, Fauntleroy uses a pseudonym (ask any Batman fan about Jack Napier and he'll know). L.L. Fauntleroy, as you might suspect, comes from Little Lord Faunteroy. She chose the initials, she said, because of L.L. Cool J.

Of the pranking she reflects, "I always had it in me, I just never had the gumption. Now that I have the outlet, I'm exploring it. My past isn't really all that sordid. It's only now that I've become a pillar of society that I've started pulling pranks."

**The People Haters and Seemen**

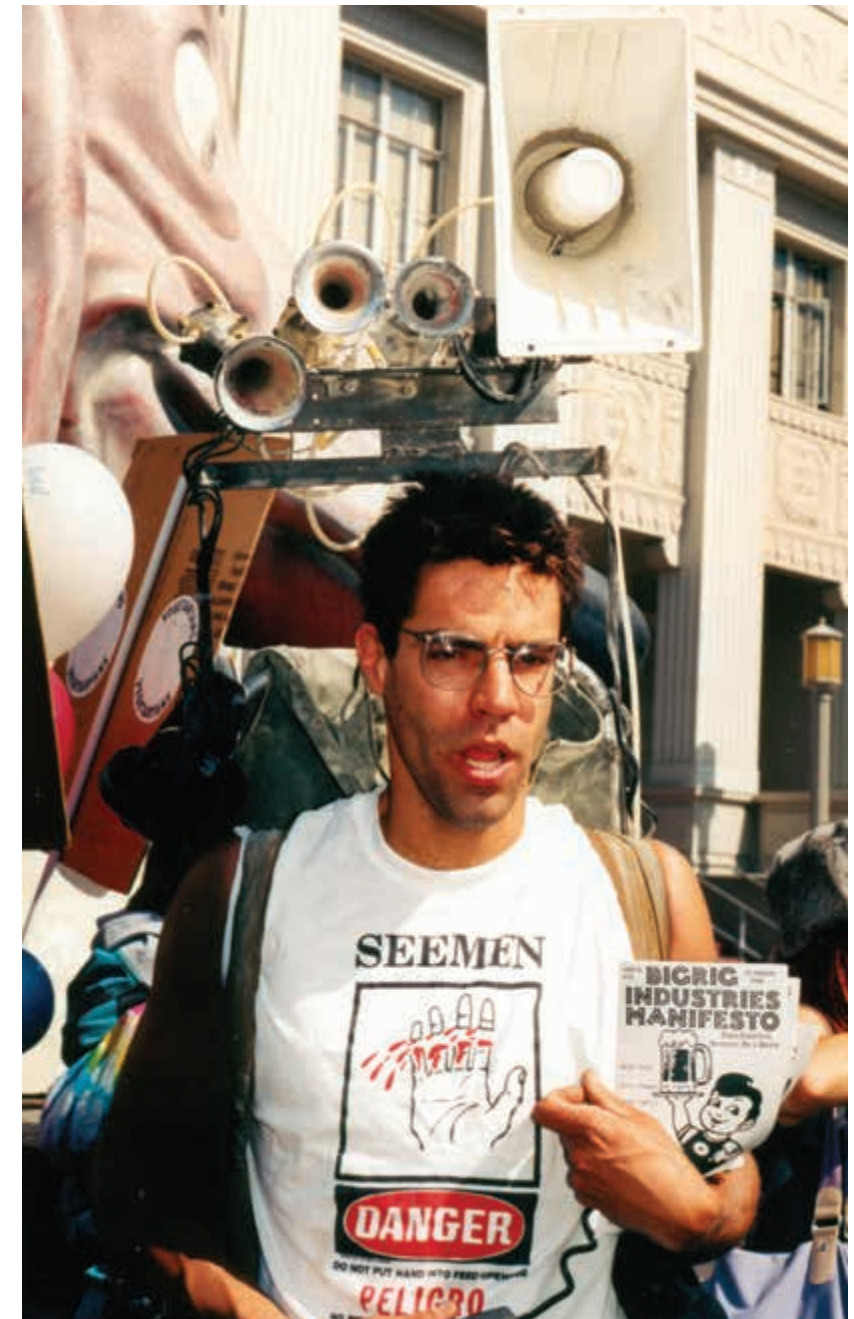
Chip Flynn and Kal Spelletich, the principals of the People Haters and Seemen, respectively, have been described by fellow pranksters as "Popular Mechanics kids gone bad" and "SRL: The Next Generation."

Both the People Haters and Seemen played a role in "A Calculated Forecast of Ultimate Doom," the sold-out SRL show last summer that transformed an abandoned warehouse at San Francisco's Pier 70 into an explosive circus. They were also chiefly responsible for "The Ritual Abduction and Rape of Rush Limbaugh," a shrill pyrotechnic spectacle on Marin Street in San Francisco last spring.

If Chip and Kal have difficulty separating their identities from Pauline and Survival Research Labs, it's not because they're unoriginal, it's just that they hang at SRL and no one quite knows what to call what they do.

**Pierre, Le Marquis de Gateau, a.k.a. Peter Doty**

Crumbs anyone? On the morning of Bastille Day, 1994, 31-year-old Peter Doty and a couple of friends went to San Francisco's City Hall dressed in full 18th century attire and carrying fancy trays with a few crumbs on them. After presenting Deputy Mayor, Frank Jordan with the "Copper Crumb" award for crummy homeless policies, Doty and company joined a crowd gathered to show support for Food Not Bombs activist Keith McHenry. Unfortunately, the members of the San Francisco Police Department present that day had no sense of humor and proceeded to arrest Doty's co-conspirators for serving food without a permit.



Above: SEEMEN avatar Kal Spelletich distributing dangerous propaganda at the 'How Berkeley Can You Be?' parade, 1996.

Despite the arrests, Doty remains undaunted. In fact, Doty, also known as Pierre, Le Marquis de Gateau, says the annual roast at Union Square, "Let Them Eat Cake," has become something of a hit. Every Bastille Day, July 14, Doty and a host of others make decadent desserts and serve them to the resident homeless people. The servers all dress in 18th-century French aristocratic garments, but often homeless people help with the act. "We had one guy last year who sat down at a piano and played Mozart," Doty recalls.

Doty says his pranks are meant as "shame tactics." And he hasn't limited himself to care of the homeless. Satires

## Doty says his pranks are meant as “shame tactics.” And he hasn’t limited himself to care of the homeless. Satires of whiny political correctness and pack journalism, for example, are probably his favorite pranks.

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When the Castro Theatre decided to show Disney’s *Fantasia* in July 1991, Doty formed CAFE, the facetious Coalition Against *Fantasia*’s Exhibition. Calling himself



Dwayne Newtron, Doty wrote a statement claiming that his six-year-old daughter’s terror at the *Night on Bald Mountain* segment had prompted him to form SPASM (Sensitive Parents Against Scary Movies).

SPASM anchored the CAFE, which also included Dieters United (who claimed that hippos in tutus were offensive to overweight people) and BADRAP (Bay Area Drought Relief Alliance Party, which felt that “water conservation efforts will be hindered by showing Mickey Mouse’s waste of water in the ‘Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ sequence”).

*The San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner* and *The Washington Post* all reported the protest as real; not one reporter bothered to check out Newtron and his nonexistent daughter or call anyone else in SPASM’s constituency. The denouement of the media hoax came a few weeks later when it was mentioned in a *Time Magazine* cover story. Finally, on April Fools’ Day the following year, Doty came clean and *The Wall Street Journal* tracked down the reporters who’d been had, including *The San Francisco Examiner*’s Rob Morse.

“I’ve been in San Francisco so long, I tend to believe anything,” Morse told *The Wall Street Journal*. “You’ve got to go pretty far in San Francisco to make something look like a joke.”

### The Suicide Club lives

Back before bungee jumping made in into *Evening Magazine*, and well before gonzo travel writer Tim Cahill stumbled into the desert and onto the pages of *Rolling Stone*, a band of San Francisco hooligans staged death defying events that tested their wits and survival instincts.

Not really about death so much as leading a zany life, they stripped naked on a cable car for an Easter Sunday photo op in 1977; they hijacked elevators at a Union Square parking garage and surprised would-be riders with pantomime shower scenes; they took over abandoned buildings for potlucks, one-night-only stage plays, and theme parties. And they climbed things; bridges, churches, whatever. They were the Suicide Club.

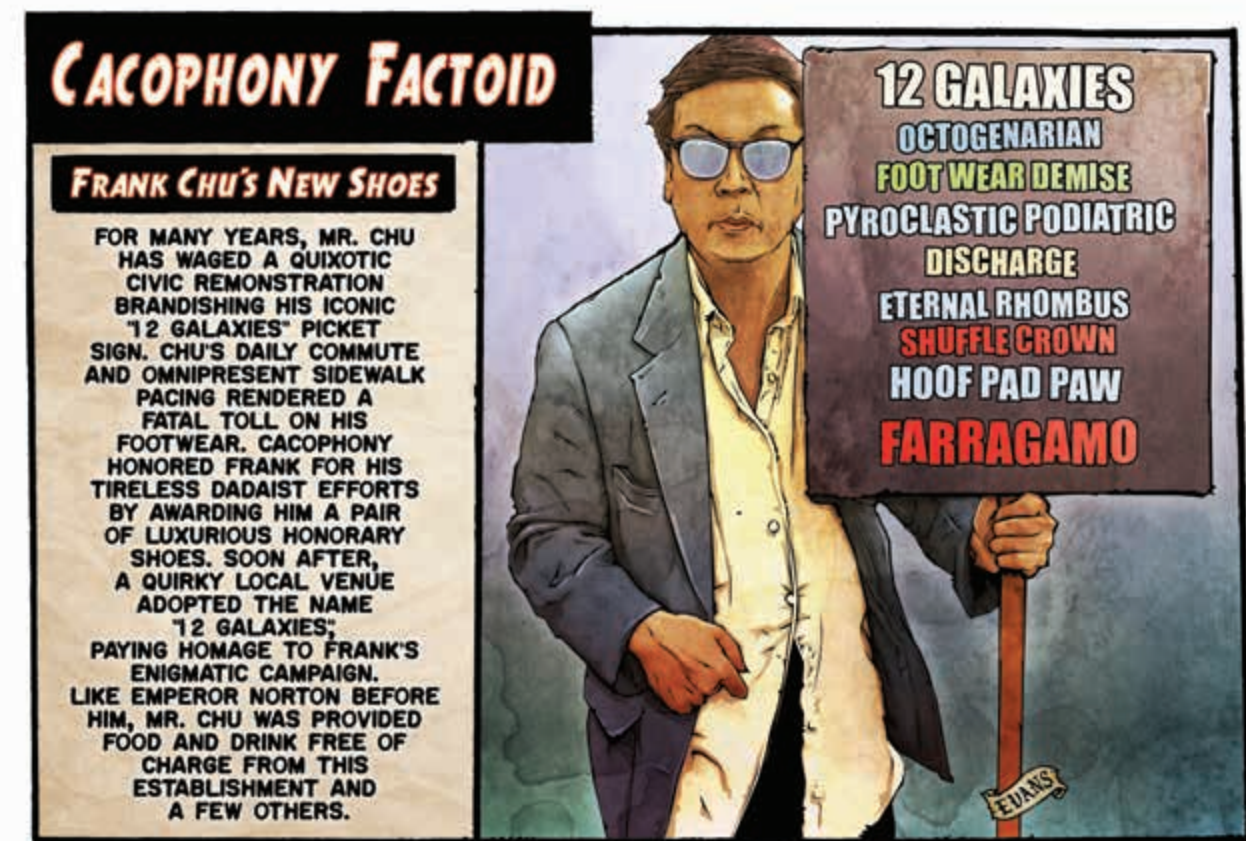
Named after a Robert Louis Stevenson story, the club formed one night when the founding four (Gary Warne, David Warren, Nancy Prussia, and Adrienne Burk) went down to Fort Point on a stormy night and dared one another to hop a fence and tempt the sea. A railing along a seawall served as a lifeline against incoming surf. Fast, heavy, and cold, the surf that night was enough to sweep any of the daredevils to a watery grave. Exhilarated afterward, the four drank tea and conceived the Suicide Club. The railing, long since corroded and removed, became a rite of initiation.

“Gary was the avatar,” recalls Sebastian Melmoth, a *nom de plume* given him by Warne. Together Warne and Melmoth did extensive urban spelunking (in places like sewers, drains, and BART and MUNI tunnels). “Everyone pushed in different ways. Nancy did the

sexier stuff. I did a lot of the events that involved climbing.” For Melmoth, “being naked in public was 10 times more frightening” than rappelling 400 feet into the bottom of an empty Evans Street gas storage tank.

The Suicide Club has been survived by the majority of its members. Some, like Don Herron (who runs the Dashiell Hammett walking tour of San Francisco), remain informed by that time. There’s also a private eye, a senior partner in one of the Bay Area’s leading investment banking firms, a neon-sign hanger, a noted architectural critic, who was then a dishwasher, a lawyer/playwright, and several social workers.

One evening last fall, several Suicide Club originals reconvened to swap stories, increase their legend, and sit for a portrait. A few of them belong to today’s Cacophony Society, but many hadn’t seen each other in years. Only one has died for certain: cofounder Gary Warne passed away a couple of days before Thanksgiving 1983. In his will he left a final dare: to scatter his ashes from the top of the Golden Gate Bridge—in broad daylight. Melmoth and company not only obliged him, they painted a bit of him inside the bridge for posterity.



Above: L.L. Fauntleroy and Melmoth at Let Them Eat Cake.



Cacophony 2.0 organizers, David Calkins and Don Hurter, present a proclamation and a pair of quality footwear to Frank Chu at the Powell Street Cable Car Turnaround. An excited Frank tries on the shoes.



Below: The Extra-Action Marching Band provides the sound track and the Flag Team the visuals for the Republican Free Speech Rally at People's Park, Berkeley.



**Cacophony Geeks**

Michael McElligott

It was the mid-1990s and we all had superhero names. That's one point on which Internet geeks and Cacophonists could always relate. Make a list of the names and you can't tell them apart: Circus Boy, Moses, Warrior Girl, Alx, Flash, Geekboy, Captain Cursor, Tomcat, Three, God Todd, Mono, Shvatz, Miss Appropriation, Vagabond Jim, Toad, Toxic, Bill the Hat, and Mikl-em. No, I won't tell you which is which or who is who. Some of them are both.

There's a rich tradition of colorful monikers for the creative and mischievous everywhere. In San Francisco in particular, hippy and punk examples abound: Wavy Gravy, Pigpen, Jello Biafra, and Frankie Fix. Ever since a failed businessman named Joshua Norton gave himself the title "Emperor of These United States", self-proclaimed nicknames have been an SF thing. And so hackers and pranksters followed the trend of artists, gangsters, circus freaks, and others who re-dub themselves in ways that add to their legends and obscure their origins.

Not that we in the geek brigade were legendary types. But we had a tendency toward fantasy and were working, genuinely, on a new frontier. Though unlike the 1849ers, who were convinced they'd find their weight in gold, the 1995 influx was more idealist than capitalist-everyone figured this slowly mainstreaming, networked-computers thing was going to be important. But no one had any idea how any money whatsoever would be made from it.

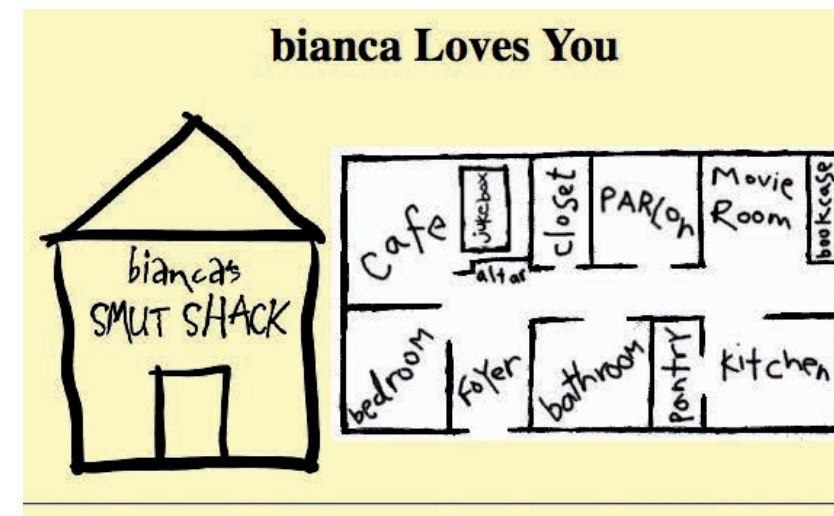
Before we moved to California from Virginia or Wisconsin or wherever, we had the ubiquitous technology of Neal Stephenson and William Gibson's science fiction in our heads and San Francisco's *Wired* and *Mondo 2000* magazines on our dorm room floors. Something that had been romantically (if you can believe it) called "Desktop Publishing" was giving way to something termed "New Media." Both were meant to convey a "democratization"

of the means of producing... sigh, "content." An online magazine, really, was the ambitious goal, as modest as it may seem now. The virtual version of *Wired* that led the way; a version with hypertext aka "hot" links. And so: *HotWired*. Back then no one said the "dot-com" part out loud. That came later.

But how did these precocious computer types cross paths with the zone-tripping, urban explorers of Cacophony? That big thing in the desert was a big part of it. A small group of the twenty-something *HotWired* staff went to Burning Man in 1994. Their minds were blown. In 1995, they went back with a larger group of *HotWired* staff and had their own theme camp, flying a flag with the website's logo. That broke the festival's rule of no corporate logos. Years later, tech companies would underwrite luxury RVs for their employees to attend the festival; the *HotWired* camp was a different case entirely. There was little if any cash involved. Instead it expressed their pride in working on the technology frontier and camaraderie with what Burning Man was doing. If the festival's organizers noticed, they ignored it.

David Thau and Chris Form Miller-known as thau! and {freeform} respectively-were part of the 1995 *HotWired* contingent. Together they ran a site called "bianca's Smut Shack." Less known now (like *HotWired* itself), bianca's was Internet famous before there was such a thing. Amongst the first thousand sites ever and recognized as the first social chat website, at the dawn of the World Wide Web bianca's was effectively the only nightclub in a sea of physics papers. Anyone who visited the web pre-1994 probably went to bianca.com on their very first surfing expedition. The design of the original "Smut Shack" chat site was based on their pre-*HotWired* apartment in Chicago. Each "room" of the site was based on the apartment layout (the kitchen, the bedroom, the pantry, etc.).

For Burning Man 1996, thau and form decided to build the Smut Shack on the playa as a theme camp. About a dozen *HotWired* folks joined in. Other geeks camped in the vicinity in an area they dubbed Irrational Geographic. In 1996, the Internet was still a fringe affair, and many of these young men and women were probably spending their longest time away from a computer in years. But many of the individuals on this small chunk of Burning Man real estate would later have a huge effect on the technology and design of the Internet as we know it today.



Above: This graphic was the "home page" for bianca's Smut Shack. bianca was the first social chat website.

Many of the bianca crew, like a lot of young Internet workers, were also part of the San Francisco rave scene and specifically the "Friends and Family" crew (no, that's not a mobile calling plan). The fact that F&F threw raves in Klub Komotion, the same venue where Chicken John's cacophonous "Church" shows went down, tells you how close these scenes were, even when they didn't intermingle.

If bianca represented the rave set, Cyberbuss was more of a neo-hippy crew. With direct inspiration from the Merry Pranksters and their Furthur bus, CyberSam converted an old school bus and painted it silver. He and his friends would don matching silver body paint and set out to dance, drum, party, and socialize on a mission to "create, communicate, connect, inspire, enlighten, evolve...and be fhREaKy." Not everyone in their group was tech-savvy; in fact, some were welders and auto mechanics. But they were all into community and that included enabling "virtual trips" for website visitors around the world to join the fun. Sam brought the 'buss' to Burning Man in 1996 and at that early date posted photos to the web directly from the festival using a satellite telephone.

The next year they threw the first Cyberbuss Ball, an all-night dance party in the somewhat remote SF 'hood of Bayview. Cyberbuss and friends arranged for a one-block street closure, then set up tents, scheduled DJs and bands, and got a big crew of Burning Man-goers, techies, and late-night partiers. Performances included rock bands, noise musicians, and rave DJs, as an upbeat and inclusive community vibe persisted.

Cyberbuss and bianca shared this attitude (bianca's motto is "bianca loves you!"), and it's a departure from the Cacophony Society in a couple ways. The geek groups were more inclusive—a mindset that follows from organizing by email and web instead of Cacophony's traditional "snail mail" and phone. And instead of the carefully planned adventures and mischief that Cacophony purveyed, the Internet set tended toward parties. They were creative parties where most attendees wore costumes, but parties, nonetheless.

Some pre-1996 BM attendees, Cacophonists and otherwise, were tech savvy. They included contributors to *Wired's* print magazine and *The Happy Mutant Handbook*, which came out in 1995; that book marked the point of the print 'zine culture evolving online into what would eventually be blogs. It was co-authored by Mark Fraunfelder, creator of *BoingBoing*, which was a print zine at the time and is now one of the most popular geek culture blogs online. As noted earlier, starting your own magazine was a really powerful concept. Burning Man was a nexus of those who wanted alternative media voices. Offline had better tools. But online was completely free and wide open.

And Cacophony was due to evolve and move online. The formal Cacophony events in *Rough Draft* would soon become outnumbered and overwhelmed by creative goings-on (and parties) posted on Scott Beale's "Alpha Squid's" e-mail list, "The Laughing Squid Event Nexus," as he called it early on. That list grew out of the Burning Man discussion list, founded in the lead up to Burning



Above: The Cyberbuss crew on a typical outing.

Man 1996, which became much more than a forum for newbie questions on driving routes to the playa. It was a mixer between Cacophonists and geeks.

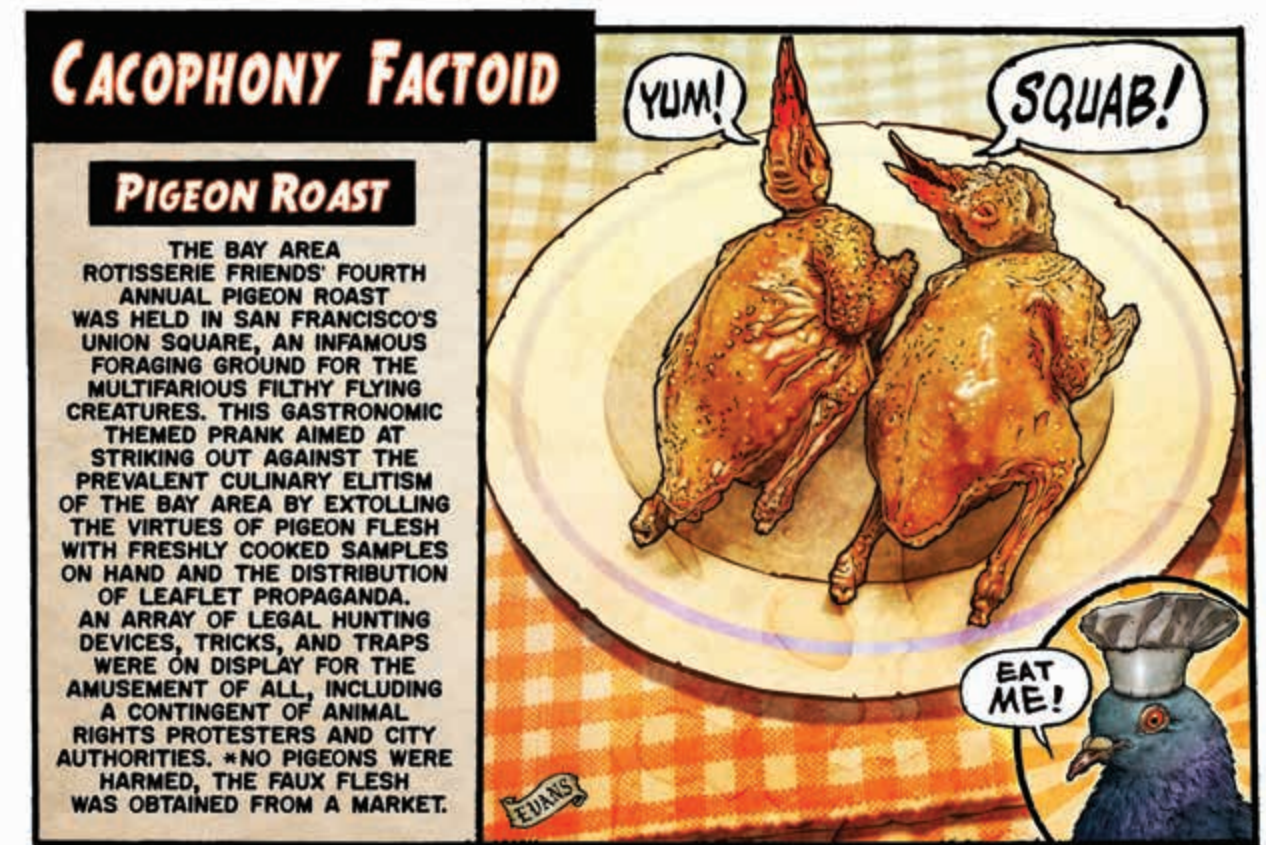
The Burning Man list was a culture clash that had very productive results. It was a crash course in the culture of Burning Man. The Burning Man veterans on the list were some of the smartest, most active, and most dialed-in to the core of the event and to its Cacophonist origins. For geeky newbies who were more comfortable writing e-mails than mingling in desert social gatherings, it was an ideal way to participate, even months before the event actually took place.

For some Cacophonists in their 30s and 40s, that e-mail list introduced them to how rich and immediate an online community can be. Everyone who was on the list the day that Sister Dana's first tentatively e-mailed the group will remember it forever. And how quickly she lost her inhibitions when she got the hang of it. Those of us who were new to the community didn't realize that she was not an anatomical female, but a drag queen nun. Cultures clash. There is enlightenment. And virtuality wins again. Scott started "Alpha Squids," which later became "The Squid List," to quickly communicate San Francisco happenings with the community that had coalesced on the Burning Man list, in the fall after Burning Man 1996. It had become a tech-Cacophony hybrid community

and the *Rough Draft* would never quite be enough again. Both because of the immediacy of e-mail and online discussions and because there were just a whole lot more people. In tech-y terms-it wouldn't scale.

Something was lost, but it's hard to argue with the energy and activity that resulted. The San Francisco creative underground really started to flourish then, as the Squid List became known as a way to hear about all kinds of weird, wonderful, unexpected events. It kept the spirit of Cacophony, but like other Internet-driven variations, it tended toward openness and inclusiveness—some events were better because so many people were there. Others failed because too many people showed up, due to the openness of the list, and because word spread so quickly.

Like Burning Man's growth, you could no longer trust that you'd know everyone at the party (or that those you didn't know shared your context). It didn't ruin everything, but it did make it different. For those lagging behind the increasingly booming Internet revolution, Scott and a couple of co-conspirators maintained a telephone hotline called "The Number." It was updated twice a week, and for a while it kept up with the pace of new events. But eventually that, too, was outmoded. There was so much going on, and only Michael Peppe and Harry Haller were calling in.



**Spinning in Detroit**

Julia Solis

It was March in Detroit, in the basement of an enormous ruin that seemed more appropriate to post-war Europe than anything in America. It had the muted colors of old history books, with sludgy brick walls, charcoal tiles, and onionskin panes of fractured glass. A fresh layer of snow carpeted the great hall of the building under blown-out skylights. Michigan Central Depot, early 1999, was riddled with thick icicles, like violent punctuation marks in the silence of the station.

I had met Carl and Dennis from the Detroit Cacophony Society a few months earlier, while co-hosting the first Santacon in New York. They soon returned to Brooklyn for the inaugural event by the Madagascar Institute, Flaming Popes, a historical and hysterical spectacle on the waterfront, where fireworks and religious attire served as the only shield against the biting cold. When they invited us to visit them in their hometown for similar mayhem, we came right out.

Now they were leading us through the station's basement towards an odd shape hanging at the end of a tunnel. It was a lifesize anatomical model dangling from a hook, a lovely two-dimensional corpse enlivening the surrounding dark decay. But of course it wasn't just an art installation. The model concealed a suspended propane tank, and as we five New Yorkers gazed around, an otherwise perfectly cherubic-looking man named Larry pulled out an AK47. We were instructed to stand back as he crouched on the floor with the rifle; someone said, "Welcome to Detroit!"

Then a shot tore through the model and into the tank, and the walls exploded in flames.

Within the blink of an eye, the figure had burned to a crisp and the tank spun in frantic circles, spewing fire. Then everything turned into what I'd only seen in such movies as "The Towering Inferno": a wall of fire blasted down the tunnel as we ran away, looking for any way out. I turned back to see a dozen people evading the flames, but one person was heading the opposite way, approaching the tank. To Hackett, creator of the Flaming Popes, this was clearly a science experiment to be studied for future events. He walked into the fire just as the last gas streamed out, and miraculously the corridor snapped back into its dark and icy state, as if nothing had ever happened. And we marveled again. What had just been the stage for a dramatic and magical performance was now only a rotting cellar room in a building filled with trash, graffiti, and the occasional screams of dying scrappers. It was a surprise to walk back outside and find it was a bland afternoon, with no drama in sight.

It wasn't until 2007 that my friends and I set our first Dark Passage event in Detroit, a vast scavenger hunt centered around the mythological figure of the Nain Rouge. It ended with an avant-garde dance in sequins and antler masks under the flash-lit disco ball of an abandoned theater. But to see Detroit as a city full of magical potential for play and performance – a few guys with a cardboard cut-out and a rifle had set the stage for that quite a few years before.



Above: The Madagascar Institute burns something. Again.



Dark Passage events require elaborate planning and can involve the dissemination of obsessive and cryptic clues for the players. This full-sized wall poster designed by Bryan Papciak could have been a template for navigating the extensive street, tunnel and abandoned building adventure, "The Nelson Affair," or perhaps it was merely a beautiful red herring. This convoluted and dark event marked the tenth anniversary of Dark Passage.



**The Madagascar Institute Loves You!**

What you need to know first of all about the Madagascar Institute is that it's not a collective. That sounds too hippy, too delicate, and not dangerous enough. They're a "combine," a group dedicated to making the kinds of exploding machines that we often dream up for a second before relegating to the corners of our imagination.

Their nearly impossible sculptures and amusements, live performances, and guerrilla events (think Flaming Soccer, Jet Blenders, Zombie Freak Outs, Death Rattlers, Condiment Wars, Electrified See-Saws, and so on) aren't created for the turtle-necked contemplation of the museum. They thrive on the big, messy, and inspiring public engagement of the carnival, of the parade, of those moments that slacken jaws and get people jumping up and down—and sometimes running for safety. It's the kind of art that could kill you. But if it's just bleeding and it's not from an artery, says co-founder Chris Hackett, then you can't really complain about it.

- Motherboard Magazine 2-10-01

A typical Hackett Madagascar call to arms:

**Call for Chariots**

Chariot races! Jankety, cobbled together, dangerous-to-even-look-at chariots, pedal-powered versus jet-powered versus people-pulling-a-rebuilt-Idiotarod-shopping cart versus a motorcycle-with-minor-variations smashing and crashing and racing around a tightly-turning track in heats of four, all for crappy trophies, but tons of glory, admiration, and envy at your boundless intestinal fortitude, brilliant creativity, and clever use of limited building skills. Tattoos are for wusses (did you know you can just walk in off the street and BUY tattoos? How punk rock); scars have to be earned.



The Madagascar Institute will also be doing a whole bunch of other stuff, like running ten years' worth of dubious carnival rides and a whole rube-fueled midway. We want you to be a part of it. We want you to make a chariot, and race it, and if you survive, we guarantee that you will get so, so laid (or, at least, ... screwed. Whatever.)

We are going for something like that classic scene from Ben Hur, except without horses, but with more whips, dirty tricks, and Charlton Heston.

To keep things interesting, we have decided to distill out the essence of chariot-ness and leave that as the only necessary condition, and that's almost the only rule: the thing has to move, and it needs to have at least one person standing, nobly, exposed and unsupported from the ribs up. If it fits those criteria, it is a chariot. All the rest (how it is propelled, how many people ride on it, the defensive/offensive weaponry) is up to you.

There are a few more things, not rules, per se, but caveats and things you should know:

No projectile weapons. If you want to hit your opponents with something, by all means go for it, but take responsibility for your actions and tie that water balloon to a stick.

No whining. There will be blood: we expect, and are looking forward to mayhem. You will probably be crushed, burnt, spindled, poked, and ground into a fine paste. People will laugh at your misfortune. If the possibility of the Hurting is too much for you, stay away. Riders assume all risk. Also, the races might or might not be "fair."

There is no money. We are operating on a budget of zero, which, after our expenses, leaves zero to give you, so we will not help fund your chariot and no matter how awesome it is, there will be no prize money; we will not pay to repair you or your thing after it is destroyed during the race. However, there will probably be beer for participants.

No fake ideas. We do not want to hear about the awesome thing that you thought of but will not actually make. Reality is a lot more interesting.



Above: Madagascar gladiators battle on the streets of Brooklyn. Founded by Chris Hackett, Eric Singer, and Ryan O'Connor in 1999, Madagascar incorporated the machine art ambition of SRL with the street event predilection of Cacophony creating a thoroughly New York style cabal of pranksters, artists, and provocateurs. Facing page: The Billboard Liberation Front "improved" the Apple "Think Different" campaign in 1998. BLF members were reputedly annoyed by this grammatically challenged, multi-million dollar campaign.

**FAUXVERTISING: THE REALEST THING**

D.S. Black, *SF Examiner*, November 12, 1997

Charlie@levi.com was the macabre address given on the billboard. At the bottom of a red, psychedelic vortex, the coolly deranged face of Charles Manson surveyed eastbound traffic approaching the Bay Bridge.

The BLF (Billboard Liberation Front) had struck again, performing a "signage improvement" on a high concept cigarette ad peddling jean-o-cide on the largest billboard in the City. This culture-jamming, guerrilla organization has provided Northern Californians with "truth in advertising since 1977."

By using the jailed cult leader and celebrity-slayer as a corporate spokesconvict, the BLF linked the selling of '90s lifestyle accessories with the dark and killer side of the '60s—a far cry from woozy summer of love nostalgia.

It might seem a bit extreme, until one realizes that the parody could almost pass for a real advertising campaign in this day and age. In the '60s Warhol used images of Chairman Mao to sell mass-produced art. In the '90s, Stalin appears in display ads in slick lifestyle magazines aimed at the moneyed digerati.

Can Hitler and Pol Pot be far behind? Why not have Lee Harvey Oswald or Charlie Manson, two of America's most notorious killers, pimping blue jeans? The logic of the market place has never been strong on taste.

When Calvin Klein packed all the downtown Decaux kiosks with bulimic, heroin-chic models and the words "JUST BE," was that in bad taste? It prompted one ad hoc group to fire up the laser printer, roll out the office labels, and change every one of them to JUST BUY.

Direct action—vigilantism—is a time-honored San Francisco tradition. Instead of lynching suspected killers and crooks, as the Committees of Vigilance did in the 1850s, today's outlaw activists don't shoot the messenger; they mutate the message.

The French call this act of subversive appropriation *détournement*, a lively and ironic genre; we might call it fauxvertising, where a message is creatively falsified to reach a higher truth or deeper meaning. It takes an unacceptable sales pitch and turns it into a provocative statement. Instead of selling something one may or may not need, the idea is to kill your television and start thinking about issues that concern all of us, which is the last thing advertisers want us to do.

Situationist writer Guy Debord described our modern world as "the society of the spectacle." For many of us, bread and circuits are not enough.

Beginning with futurism and dadaism, the avant garde movements of this century have frequently employed



cutup methods, from collage to “found” artwork, as a means of disclosing dreams and teasing truth from the dark matter of everyday life.

Some ads have recently absorbed the graffiti style, leading one billboard for a new car to look as though it had been altered in ways that burnished its message. From a welcoming “Hi,” the car’s greeting was crudely spraycanned by the advertising company to read “Hip,” which prompted a further correction by a disgruntled member of the public: “Hype 666.”

When Billy Graham came to town, the faithful were summoned by ads in windows and the dirigible-sized broadsides we call billboards. One clever group of media heretics inserted by the words “Do You Know Where You’re Going Tomorrow?” the upraised hand with beckoning finger used by Microsoft to sell its web browser. Only something was different: instead of a come-hither, the finger pointed upward, an F-word to the pious.

“It was a gesture which is certainly in line with how many either view their computers, or the people who peddle them,” wrote a friend in an e-mail after spying this altered billboard.

Fortunately she snapped a picture, as the form is ephemeral. Corrections usually last mere hours before a new paid message is slapped over them.

We live in a market society. Increasingly this commodity culture is abuzz of sales activity. With consumption the engine of the economy, that vast sucking sound—the noise of “progress”—is so taken for granted it gets to beg some awfully big questions.

Public space has been carved up and sold to the highest bidder. Our attention and interest as consumers is itself a resource to be exploited, and to this end we see media collaborate in evangelizing a mindless and voracious way of life.

Do we live to buy, or buy to live? Given the struggle to survive, it’s small wonder the expression “bought it” used to mean killed in action.

“The only war that matters is the war against the imagination,” chanted Diane di Prima at the recent Summer of Love commemoration.

In this time of toxic information overload, our real heroes are cut and paste warriors like the BLF, who put themselves on the line to make us smile, and give us something to think about. A pause for reflection: a gift of the realest thing.

D.S. Black is a San Francisco writer who will be observing “Buy Nothing Day” the Friday after Thanksgiving.

Published in a slightly edited form by *The SF Examiner* on November 12, 1997.



Above: This BLF gem is, to date, the only full-scale neon billboard alteration in the annals of street art. Joe Camel was retired as a cigarette spokes-animal shortly after this action and the attendant media coverage.

### Free the Billboards!

Tim Redmond

*San Francisco Bay Guardian*, January 10, 1990

THE CALL came in on a Monday, a little after midnight.

“This is Jack,” the caller said. “Jack Napier. From the BLF.”

Right. Jack Napier. The BLF. I closed my eyes and tried to make my memory work through the deadline-night bourbon-and-beer-for-dinner haze. The Brothers of Love Family? The Black Lung Foundation? The Bourgeois Lunatic Fringe?

I tried not to sound baffled. “OK,” I said. “I’m listening.”

“Look out your front window,” the caller continued. “Across the street from your house is a building with two stone pillars. On the back of the pillar on the right, about three feet above the ground, you will find an envelope containing your instructions. Please retrieve it immediately. We’ll be in touch.” The midnight call. The secret mail drop. The mysterious name (borrowed, I later realized, from *Batman*). This was no ordinary organization: I was dealing with the Billboard Liberation Front.

The missive from the BLF advised me to arrive alone—at Bouncers at 7:15, to sit near the phone booth, order a gin and tonic, and wait. Bouncers is an old waterfront joint down at the end of Townsend street. The decor is Traditional Shot And-A-Beer Offensive, the clientele about the same. A fair number of the regulars actually work on boats (the kind that smell like fish or rusty oil and don’t have sails). Most of the yuppies who are moving into South Beach probably find Bouncers a tad uncomfortable—and most of the old timers seem to think that’s perfectly OK. My code name was Mr. Roscoe. The bar was pretty empty when I arrived, and it was easy to find a stool near the pay phone (which turned out to be unimportant; it was out of order). I was well into my second gin and tonic when the phone behind the bar started ringing. The bartender listened for a second, scowled and barked out: “Anybody here named Roscoe?”

I identified myself, avoided his glare, and picked up the phone. “Roscoe here.” I said.

“Good evening, Mr. Roscoe,” said the voice on the other end. “We apologize for the delay, How much money did you bring?” I searched my pockets and came up with six dollars and change.

“Good,” the caller said. “Walk out to Third Street, hail the next cab, and have him take you to Treasure Island. Get out at the phone booth next to the entrance to the naval base and wait for further instructions.” The line went dead.

The fare to Treasure Island took most of my cash assets. I thanked the driver, told him not to wait, and began hoping

that somebody ran a bus back to San Francisco. By the time I reached the pay phone, it was ringing.

“Roscoe?” asked the caller. I acknowledged my identity and he immediately began talking again. “Across the parking lot from your phone booth is a construction site with a pair of portable toilets,” he said. “Do you see them?” I told him I did. “Proceed to the toilet on the right and pry open the towel dispenser. Your next instructions will be inside.”

Well, what the hell— I’d come this far. I stole a look at the half-dozen well-armed MP’s at the gatehouse (who had nothing better to do than look at me), wandered as nonchalantly as possible over to the toilet, and locked myself in. The towel dispenser opened with a light yank, and a baseball cap tumbled out. I peeled another five or six rolls worth of masking tape off the inside of the cap, and extracted a \$20 bill wrapped in a note. “Go back to the phone booth,” it said. “Stand outside and wait for our call.”

The phone was already ringing again. I picked it up. “Roscoe?” Yes, I said, that’s me. “Your cab should be there in a moment. Tell the driver to take you to the Edinburgh Castle on Geary. Pay him with the \$20 bill. Put the hat on, sit at the bar, and wait for your next contact.”

Traffic was light, and the cab got me to the Edinburgh Castle in about 20 minutes, I ordered a beer, put on the cap, and took a sip. By the time I’d put the glass down, a woman wearing gigantic, garish pink glasses had walked up to my stool. “Mr. Roscoe?” she asked. I nodded. “Come with me, please.”

When we reached the back door of the bar, she apologized, then pulled a blindfold over my head. The door opened and several hands escorted me into what seemed to be a large van. We drove around in circles for at least 15 minutes, while I explained to the assembled crew that there was no point in trying to throw me off, since I had a perfect sense of direction and knew exactly where I was at every moment, even blindfolded. I just had no particular desire to prove it to them at that point in time. When the van finally stopped, my finely honed direction sense told me we were inside a garage, someplace between San Rafael and Brisbane.

They lead me to a chair and removed the blindfold. A light was shining right into my eyes, but I could make out enough of my surroundings to determine two things: yes, we were indeed in a garage and everybody there was wearing a gruesome rubber mask. I did my best to look

as if this sort of thing happened to me all the time.

There were about 15 people at that meeting, representing most of the current active membership. They had names like Daphne Boswell, Igor Pflicht, and Mr. Glikk, and all of them wore some type of gruesome rubber mask. (One repeatedly brandished a rifle and shouted menacing words in a language I couldn't identify; I was later told his name was Walid Rasheed, and that he'd left the PLO when he decided it had become too wimpy. "But don't worry," Napier reassured me. "He's really very friendly when you get to know him.")

Over the next few months, I met several more times with smaller groups, always at random locations arranged through last-minute phone calls or secret mail drops. The folks in the BLF obviously enjoyed the whole cloak-and-dagger game.

And beyond the deranged press releases, there's also a very serious side to the BLF's mission. The BLF sees billboards for what they are: Powerful media that carry influential messages to vast numbers of people every day. That's too important to be left to the Gannetts and Patrick Medias of the world. "We have nothing against billboards," Napier told me at one point. "We love billboards. That's why we're so disturbed to see them used so badly."

Somehow, despite their security concerns, my journalistic objectivity must have impressed the BLF members: late in December, they invited me to tag along.

According to the BLF's official history, the group was founded in November 1977, at the Pacific Union Club in San Francisco, by retired businessmen and civic leaders unhappy with the inferior state of billboard advertising. I can't vouch for the accuracy of that claim— I've never been inside the Pacific Union Club, and I doubt they keep minutes of private meetings.

I can't attest to the actual backgrounds of the BLF's founders, either: none of them ever gave me their real names, and when we met, they always wore some type of disguise. But I was able to learn enough to verify a few important facts about the organization.

The BLF spans three generations— the youngest member is 10, and the oldest is somewhere in his early 60s. (Mr. Glikk, the founder, elder statesman, and spiritual leader, isn't prone to discussing his age or much of anything else with reporters.)

152

The members represent a broad range of backgrounds, skills and interests. Most of them go to work every day at steady, respectable jobs; their co-workers would probably be shocked and appalled to learn that they worked side by side with someone who spent last Saturday night hanging from a ladder 50 feet above a busy intersection, drilling holes in a huge plywood billboard, then donning a

mountain-climbing harness and carabiner to escape into the darkness down a hidden cable.

Whatever they do with the rest of their lives, all the BLF members take the billboard liberation business very seriously. A typical "hit" can involve months of planning and preparation, a crew of ten or twelve, and a dazzling amount of fancy electronic and mechanical equipment.

The advance people survey and photograph the target early in the process, and prepare precise projections for the size of the panels, letters, and artwork. Then the artistic crew attempts to produce new lettering and graphic stencils that duplicate as accurately as possible the existing billboard elements.

From those stencils, the artists prepare overlay panels.

Once upon a time, the BLF would go about its business in broad daylight, freely altering billboards above busy streets while cars, buses, and untold numbers of cops passed in blissful ignorance below. It was surprisingly easy: they bought an old service van, a bunch of ladders, and a few dozen sets of white coveralls, painted "Acme Sign Company" on the sides of the van and the backs of the coveralls, picked out targets, and set up shop.

But after a few rather prominent hits, the police began to pay more attention to those innocent-looking guys climbing the sides of billboards. A few close calls brought the Acme game to an end, and BLF security procedures began to get serious.

These days, the three or four people who actually climb the board are backed up by as many as a dozen lookouts, strategically placed in a host of disguises at critical points around the site. Everyone carries radios, and the folks on the board are in constant communication (through a complicated code system) with those on the ground. Several different escape routes are planned and checked out in advance, and the whole operation gets at least one "dress rehearsal" to iron out any bugs.

I got the final call just a few hours before I was expected to be in place. I was to dress warmly, in old clothes, and bring a sleeping bag. I'd meet my contact, Mabel, at a quiet corner in the Richmond District at precisely 11 pm.

Mabel had lookout duty. She'd been instructed to park on the south side of Fifth Street, between Folsom and Harrison, and proceed on foot to a small clump of trees near the Bryant St. freeway ramp. It was a nice, quiet, dark place to sleep, and most nights it attracted at least a handful of homeless campers. It was also almost directly below the gigantic billboard that, I was finally told, was the target of the night's action. The miniature park was a perfect lookout spot: From the perspective of a couple of transients trying to crash out in the deep shadows of the trees, we could command a sweeping view of Fifth,

Bryant and most of the freeway on-ramp -- and a perfect close-up view of the billboard a few yards away.

The first indication that the job was underway came a little before midnight, when the banks of foodlights that illuminated the board suddenly went dark. Once again, I was impressed by the intricacies of the BLF planning: The board was one of several major, well-lit highway signs and billboards in the immediate area, and with the lights off, it became so comparatively dim that it might as well have vanished from the planet. Killing the lights, Napier later told me, was simple: The electrical switches were all in a box at the base of the board's support structure. This was their billboard now, and when they were done with it, they wanted it to be fully illuminated for all to see.

A few minutes later, I saw the first person climb the structure and secure a place on the ledge behind the board. He passed down ropes, and in minutes, two others had joined him and had begun hauling up their tools and materials.

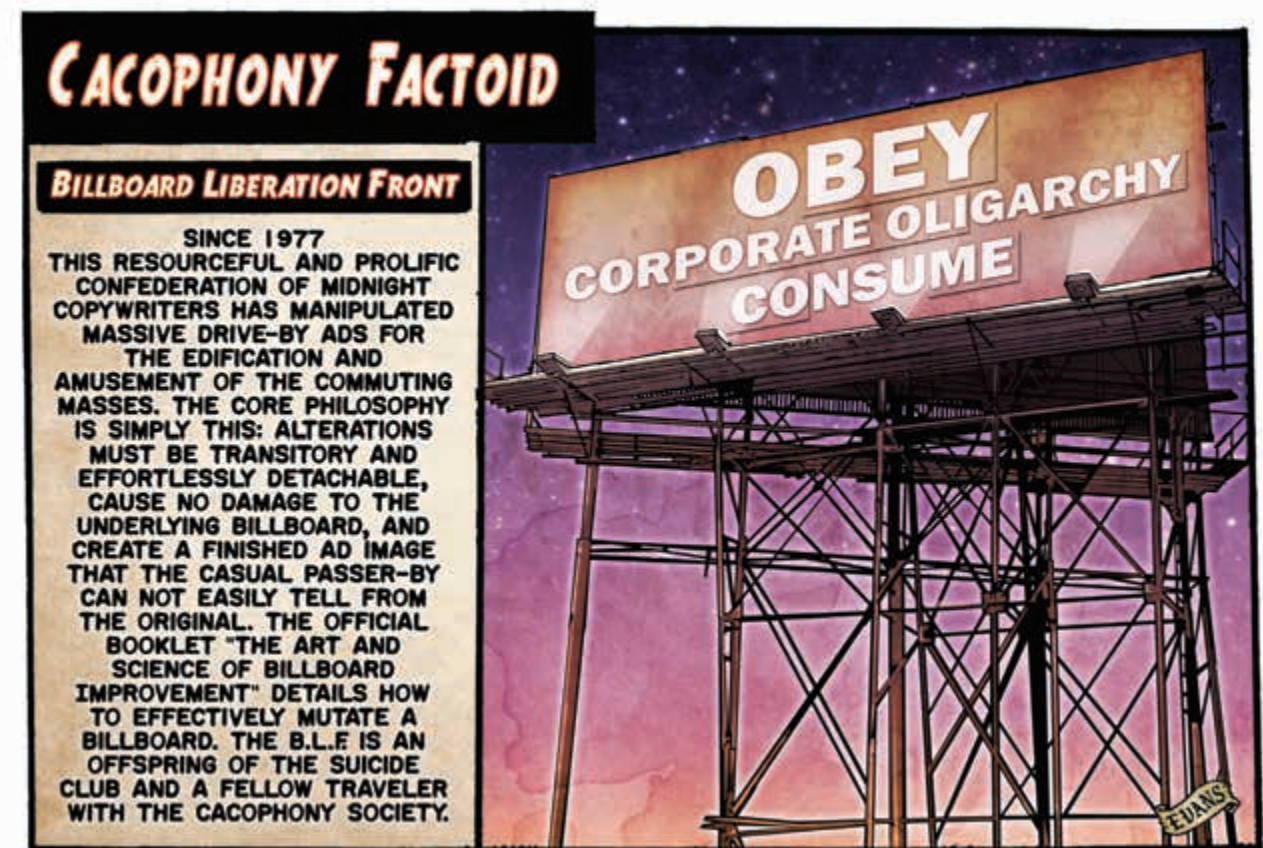
Mabel and I watched and waited as the three people on the board hoisted the panels into place, lowered them down the front of the board, climbed a ladder on the face of the board, bored holes with a battery-operated drill through several layers of plywood and sheet metal, and bolted the

new panels into place. Every few minutes, a voice crackling over the radio would warn of an approaching police car; the billboard crew would drop to the ledge and lie flat until the danger passed. The process took almost three hours.

The instant the last panel was in place, one of the crew gave the order to "get the hell out of here," and in seconds, two bodies were sliding upside down along a doping cable, from the top of the board to the base of the freeway several hundred feet away. Then the rope vanished and the last person climbed down the side of the support structure. A minute or two later, the lights came back on.

On Tuesday morning, when a sign crew from Patrick Media removed the new panels, the casino message emerged unscathed. The product of more than two months work, hundreds of dollars worth of supplies, and the vision, craft, and skill of a dozen odd people survived for just 48 hours. Then the BLF officially faded into the shadows.

But the ultimate message remains: as long as these jokers are at large, no billboard anywhere will ever really be safe. And that's a nice thought for the dawn of a new decade.



153

Following two pages: The BLF, in collusion with New York artist Ron English, celebrate Ronald McDonald's 50th Anniversary with the first billboard hack in history to use an animatronic figure as part of the tableau. Long-time collaborators, English and a BLF founder, Jack Napier, were inspired to do this billboard after reminiscing about a 1960s *Twilight Zone* episode they both saw as children about space aliens with a taste for human flesh.



“...so what is in the trunk of that '79 Lincoln anyway?”

“At the Tunnel Top Bar on Bush St., the bartender passed me an envelope with directions: I was to proceed to a particular street corner and look up. There I saw my first altered billboard. Within the ad, Jack Napier and his BLF cohorts had created a box of type that was surprisingly unobtrusive, like the warning label on a cigarette ad. It said: “Check in trunk of '79 Lincoln at Ace Auto Dismantlers.”

starving artists and a low rent punk rock and machine art performance venue for over two decades. Survival Research Labs Director Mark Pauline was the first artist to realize the rich potential of Ace for materials to be used in the creation of new forms of kinetic art. Pauline coined the term “obtanium” meaning any cool piece of industrial detritus procured through means legitimate or “extra-legal” and intended for the purpose of art

## William Kennedy ran Ace as a private fiefdom, a one stop art supply depot for starving artists and a low rent punk rock and machine art performance venue.

Standing beneath this personalized billboard, I think I felt the full power of advertising for the first time in my life. Unfortunately, I didn't have the time to admire my vanity board for long, because I had to shlep across town to Ace Auto Dismantlers. This was the other part of the game Napier had set up. Rather than just have me track him via billboard messages - that would be too easy - he had each billboard direct me to a bizarre pit-stop, where I'd retrieve directions to the next billboard. When I arrived at Ace, I kept the cab running as I ran in and told the yard boss that I needed to check in the trunk of a '79 Lincoln. “Is it your car?” When I answered no, he asked “Is this a drug deal?” I forced a laugh. He looked around and pointed to a nearby car. Unfortunately, a forklift had just dropped a huge wrecking ball onto the trunk, caving it in. “You mean that car?” He asked, laughing sadistically. Undeterred, I politely asked the man in the fork lift if he could pry open the crushed trunk because I needed something in there. He agreed to do it, but wanted to know: “If there was a body in there?”

Actually, there was. The truck was pried open to reveal a dummy clad in military fatigues. Cold-bloodedly, I reached in and rummaged throughout the pockets, finding my envelope containing the clue to my next billboard. “Gotta go!” I say cheerily as the junkyard crew began to circle behind me.”\*

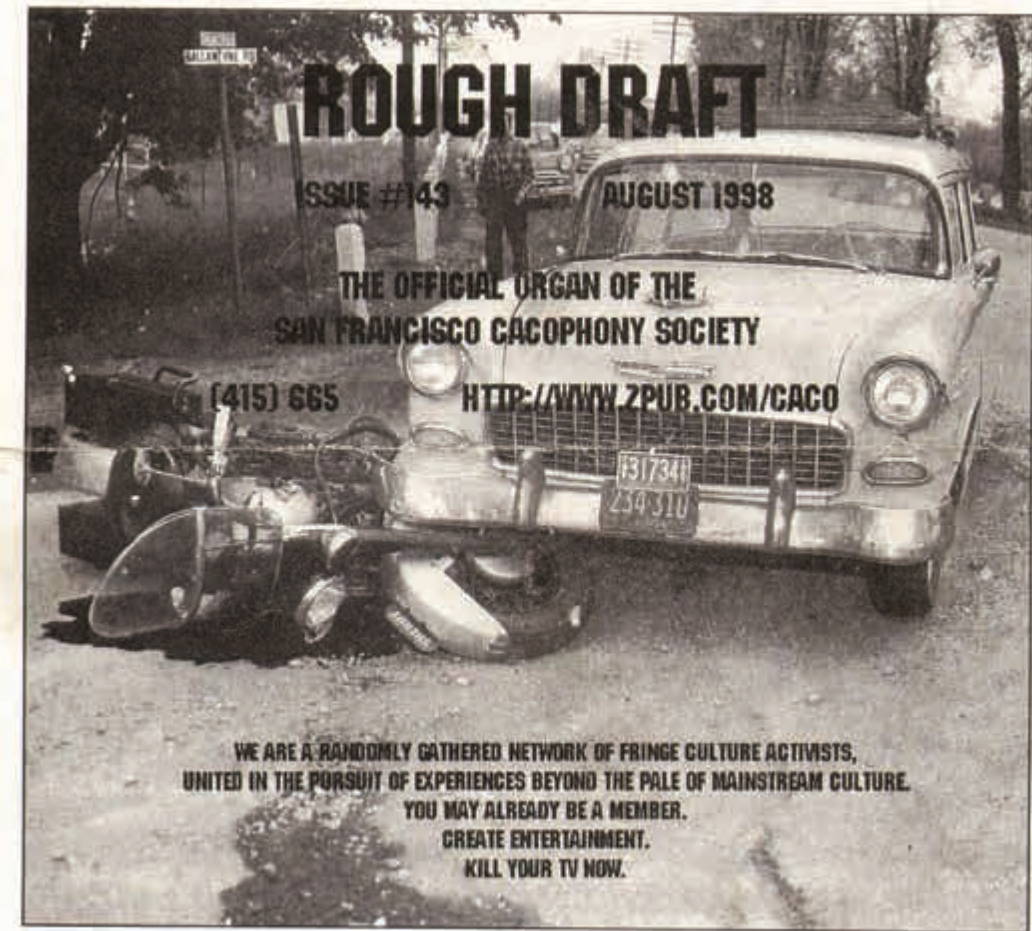
While in SF to cover the Billboard Liberation Front for *Wired Magazine* New York A list journalist Warren Berger got a taste (and smell) of a San Francisco institution and was fortunate to meet, however briefly, one of the most beneficent, if colossally atypical arts patrons in the Bay Area. William Kennedy, of the Kennedy junk yard family (all three brothers, and their parents had their own junkyards in the Bayview neighborhood) ran Ace as a private fiefdom, a one stop art supply depot for

mayhem. Pauline, Chip Flynn, and other machine artists realized they had discovered the holy grail: picking up motors, trashed fork lifts, various machine tools and the like for nearly nothing from Billy the Junkman, as he was known. Once Billy realized these greasy Carhardt overall and horned rim glass wearing mechanics were starving artists, the prices for junkyard gold decreased, often to a few dollars for stuff he could have waited a bit and sold for exponentially more to commercial and private car owners looking for the right part.

Billy's largesse soon blossomed and expanded. Absolutely destitute punk bands like Junkyard Sluts, Fluff Girl, and Los Banos found the junkyard to be the perfect venue, with the Junkman often leaving them with most or all the money made at the gate and by selling cheap beer. Cacophony organizers often used the resources of Ace either as a performance venue or as a place to get stuff for whatever project was at hand. Cyclecide Bike Rodeo called Ace its home for several years, as Billy allowed them to occupy a large corrugated bay in the back of the lot. An entire generation of Burning Man “artists” procured piles of fabulous junk used for fabricating the next big flame throwing, blink light, motorized disco rave platform they expected to be the talk of the playa that year.

Large scale, televised events like The Power Tool Drag Races promoted by Charley Gadekin and emceed by Dr. Hal Robins, Chicken John, and John Hell for the Discovery Channel were mounted at Ace, as well as formal dress dinners. It was the perfect venue for Cacophonists with a mechanical bent.

\*Berger, Warren, excerpt from “Unmasked! The Billboard Liberation Front Reveals Itself.” *Creativity Magazine*, June 2000.



### ... BRUNK

SUNDAY, AUGUST 9TH, 11 AM.  
A SURPRISE BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR THE BENEVOLENT OPERATOR OF SAN FRANCISCO'S FAVORITE JUNK YARD. BRUNK IS A FORMAL BREAKFAST/LUNCH SERVED AMID THE CASTOFF WRECKAGE OF AMERICA'S MASS PRODUCTION. JOIN US FOR FINE DINING, DIRT, OIL AND CHAMPAGNE. AFTER SELECTING YOUR OWN PRIVATE BOOTH, A COMPLEMENTARY GOURMET MEAL WILL BE ELEGANTLY SERVED. PLEASE BRING CHAMPAGNE TO SHARE. FORMAL WEAR REQUIRED: BLACK TIE & EVENING GOWNS. SENSIBLE FOOTWEAR IS ADVISED (COMBAT BOOTS). DRESS CODE STRICTLY ENFORCED. OBJECTS IN MIRROR MAY BE GETTING CLOSER. ADVANCE RESERVATIONS REQUESTED, CALL (415)  
LOCATION: ACE AUTO WRECKERS, 2255 MCKINNON ST. TAKE BAYSHORE SOUTH PAST ARMY ST. AND DRIVE THRU THE BURGER KING PARKING LOT. KEEP GOING STRAIGHT AHEAD FOR ONE BLOCK AND YOU'LL FIND THE CARNAGE ON YOUR RIGHT. SHOW UP AT 10 AM TO HELP WITH SETUP. PLEASE DON'T TELL BILL, WE WOULD LIKE TO SURPRISE HIM.

### ... FULL CIRCLE

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1998.  
THE FIRST BURNING MAN, CONCEIVED BY LARRY HARVEY AND BUILT BY JERRY JAMES, WAS ERECTED AND BURNED ON THE SUMMER SOLSTICE, 1986 AT BAKER BEACH IN SAN FRANCISCO BEFORE A GROUP OF TWENTY ATTENDEES. AN EXACT REPLICA OF THE ORIGINAL EIGHT-FOOT FIGURE WILL BE BURNED AT SUNSET AT THE ORIGINAL LOCATION ON BAKER BEACH. FOR MORE INFO, CALL "THE NUMBER" (415)

### ... SOUNDS LIKE CACOPHONY ...

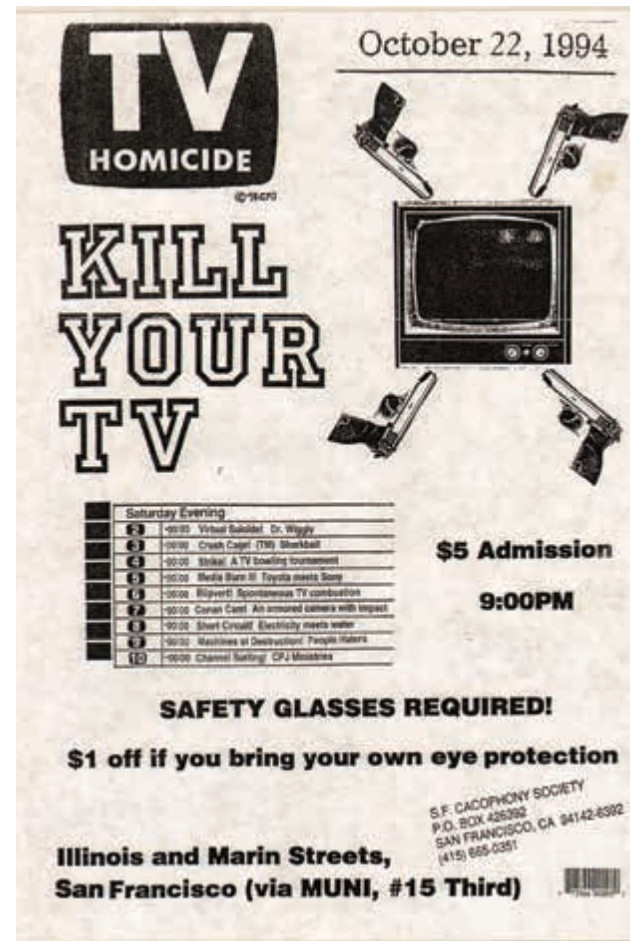
#### ... ACME CUSTOM II

AN EXHIBITION OF HOT RODS, CHOPPERS, LOW BROW ART, FIBERGLASS SCULPTURE, METAL SCULPTURE, TATTOO FLASH, CUSTOM BIKES, AND MUSIC.

HOSTED BY SAN FRANCISCO'S OWN SPACE COWGIRLS, THIS SHOW WILL FEATURE SUCH LEGENDS AS PRARRIE PRINCE, ROBERT WILLIAMS, SPAIN RODRIGUEZ, S. CLAY WILSON, TWIST, FRANK KOZIK AND VON FRANCO AND THE UNSUNG JOHN MCGEE, KELLY CALDWALLER AND ALONSO SMITH. ALSO APPEARANCES AND/OR ARTWORK BY ANTHONY AUSGANG, ALAN FORBES, ANGEL OF DEATH, CHICKEN JOHN, ARIAL MARTIN, ROBERT BURKE, CHAINSAW CHUCK MAJEWSKI, JIM MASON, SEEMEN, ISABEL SAMARES. CHECK OUT THE MASTERS OF CUSTOM TRANSFORMATION. SEE AN OLD FAVORITE, THE VEG-O-MATIC OF THE APOCALYPSE AND INTRODUCING A NEW CHROME AND STEEL FABRICATION, THE V8-DRIVE DUAL BLENDER.  
CAR CLUBS: ROAD ZOMBIES & ROYAL JOKERS  
BANDS: THE DEMONICS, THE MUTALATORS & MASKED MEXICAN WRESTLERS

#### CLOSING RECEPTION:

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8TH, 7:30 PM TO 1:00 AM  
\$7 ADMISSION  
SOMAR GALLERY, 934 BRANNAN ST. AT 8TH ST., SAN FRANCISCO  
DRESS CODE: JAMES DEAN ROCKABILLY CUSTOM ART  
CAR RAT FUNK.  
(415) HTTP://ACMEGALLERY.COM



"...what I had hoped would be a forward thinking statement on the nature of life in a technological society quickly devolved into a full-scale riot; what was planned as a controlled exhibition of anger and frustration became merely a high-falutin' excuse for mindless, wanton destruction." Cassel, Bill, "Does TV Encourage Violent Behavior?", *Might*, Feb/March 1995

There were five hundred televisions in piles and leaning crazily, stacked along a massive metal warehouse wall on Illinois Street, just south of Marin Street on the Islais Creek Channel. Once a thriving low rent smugglers port and an outflow to the bay for the toxic waste and effluvia of the neighborhood formerly known as Butchertown, by 1994 this non-descript block was occupied by a motley passel of artists and builders. Kal Spellitech and The SEEMEN collective held the corner space of the old Alcoa building factory. The Greenpeace space housed surveillance vehicles and field communication gear; next door was Scott Arfords' 7HZ noise space, further down was The Cathaus, next door to Cyclone Warehouse space, home to Don Paul Swain's Cacophony-spawned Circus X.

Many singular and, in some cases, ill-advised events had taken place in this industrial no-man's land over the years. The Suicide Club used the abandoned ship-to-shore fueling station pier at the very end of Illinois street for the grand finale shoot out for Don Herron's Fatty Arbuckle Caper in 1981, before the artists had supplanted the security gated auto mechanic and body shops. Later the



Above: The flyer for Kill Your TV created by Kevin Evans, mimicking the *TV Guide*. The "Virtual Suicide" set created by Kimmrick Smythe at the Cacophony Society's Kill Your TV event in early 1994.

SEEMEN staged large scale machine art performances on the dead-end block including Death of Grunge and Death of Rush Limbough.

Kill Your TV was to be the largest and most absurd to ever take place in this off the map wonderland for wayward performance artists.

Cacophonist Chad Mulligan, with the assistance of M2 and Melmoth, had been hauling dozens of defective cathode ray tube units out of TV repair shops all round the SF Bay Area for months. The shop keepers all had their back rooms and garages stuffed to the rafters with junk TV's - and they were overjoyed someone was dumb enough to haul them all away for no charge.

During the course of the event, all 500 televisions were smashed to bits by performers and residents, but mostly by enthusiastic participants who bowled through, hurled, bludgeoned, and skewered them. Industrial band Sharkbait suited up audience members in kevlar gauntlets, crash helmets and leather welding chaps, put them in a chain link all-surround cage, and played industrial noise through a stack of Marshall amps while the lucky ones flailed away at the offensive appliances with sledghammers. Machine Art ensemble Survival Research Labs had the end of the street and with Mark Pauline's V-1 rocket engine spewing fifty foot flames, ignited a large moveable prop made by PeopleHater and a pyramid of TV's playing a loop-edit of absurd and banal video

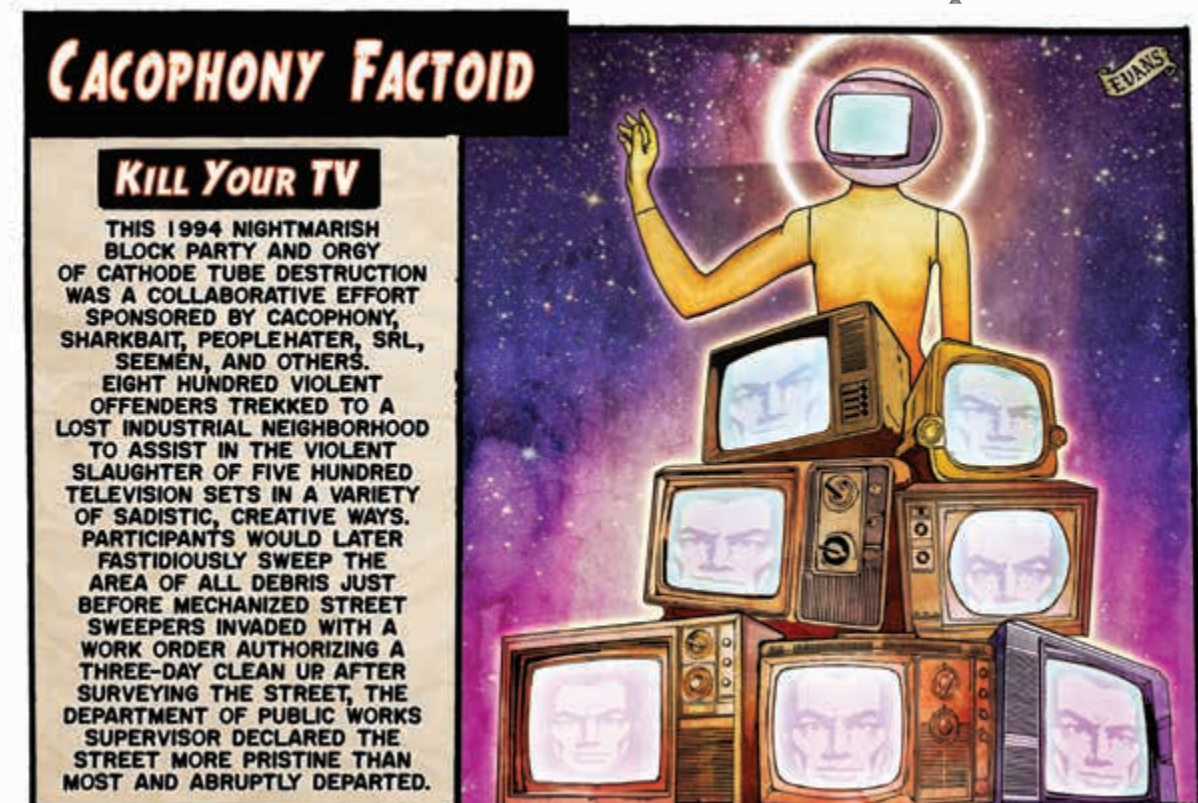
pornography spliced with mundane industrial training films designed, programmed, and built by Vanessa Kuemmerle.

Late Saturday night/Sunday morning, after the Fire Department and various police officials chased away the stragglers, the clean-up began in earnest. Two forty yard dumpsters and a twenty-four foot Ryder rental truck were filled with bashed sets. Clouds of phosphorous, chromium, and lead dust were ingested, clogging lungs and, eventually, shortening lives.

The entire block's worth of dirt (the street was unpaved at that time) was strained through wire mesh trays to extract any pieces of glass or electronic detritus bigger than a poppy seed.

On Sunday around noon, an SF Fire Dept. command staff car cruised up and down the street. The clean up was still under way.

Monday morning, an official from the Environmental Protection Agency stopped his car, got out with a clipboard, looked around, shrugged, and left. Shortly after, two San Francisco Port Authority trucks and a five man crew showed up with a three-day work order to "dispose of toxic debris and thoroughly clean adversely affected Port property." The foreman asked a Cyclone tenant "where's the toxic accident?" He looked around a bit, then cleared out to the coffee shop with his crew.



**NIGHT CRAWLER -Games People Play**

Silke Tudor, *SF Weekly*, Wednesday, Jun 21 2000

At high noon, under the cable car turnaround at Fisherman's Wharf, a group of 25 men and women in business attire and dark sunglasses arrive carrying cell phones and walkie-talkies. They look stern, tight-lipped, ready for action. There are five briefcases and one set of jewels. The object of the game, Smuggler, is for the FBI to capture the jewels before the jewel thieves can get them to home base. Historically -- in games played in Chinatown and on the Embarcadero -- the FBI has always had the advantage, but there are pitfalls at Fisherman's Wharf: very heavy car traffic, security guards who don't like interlopers, and, of course, tourists.

We make our way to the finish line, the Fisherman's Wharf ship wheel on Jefferson and Taylor. We line up, while mobs of tourists stop and snap pictures. We pick teams, and the thieves head off with their loot. Two agents guard the wheel while the rest spread out across two square blocks to guard the perimeter. It's a nerve-wracking wait. Looking for suits among the throng of colorfully clad sightseers, I nearly tag a real businessman with an innocent briefcase. Radio contact tells us that the thieves are closing in.

FBI agents are chasing thieves through nearby souvenir shops. Frantic searches are taking place in alleyways. The jewels are nowhere to be found. One thief is nearly captured by a casual bystander, but, using an old football maneuver, she escapes both the citizen and the agent in hot pursuit. The jewels are still nowhere to be found. The thieves are on their way. I'm agitated. I can't get a clear view of our perimeter. There are too many people. The Nicaraguan band behind us has drawn a crowd. They're in our finish line. Some of them are wearing suits. I'm sweating. I can see two thieves in the parking lot behind us, hiding behind the valet booth. There are two more on the southwest corner, moving fast through the crowd. I want to back up, but the other agents have their hands full with decoy briefcases. There's no way to tell. Suddenly, it's a rush. Thieves coming in from all directions. We capture two suspects but it's hard to expect the unexpected. While searching faux cases, a car pulls up to the stoplight, and a thief jumps out, depositing the briefcase containing the jewels in the safe zone.

The FBI is pissed.



Above: Lotteria Cabal hosted many live-action street games using the urban landscape as a playground. This 'Smuggler' game took place in Chinatown and Fisherman's Wharf during a typical work day.

We switch sides and make our way to the starting point at the cable car turnaround. Radio contact informs us that the fuzz has arrived at our finish line. An observant little girl who has been watching the game with her father innocently points out that we're "just playing Cops and Robbers." But there's nothing to be done. The finish line and the starting line must be switched, leaving the cops searching ineffectually for rowdy daytrippers in suits. We're too fast, bolting in and out of Ghirardelli Square, through the service entrances of hotels, around parked cars. Twenty-nine-year-old FBI agent Trixie Dare camouflages herself by looking through a garbage can before an onlooker tips her off to a nearby villain, 38-year-old Christopher Valentine. She chases Valentine through a construction site, tagging him just as he is pulling the basement door closed. No jewels. Forty-six-year-old Porky Pig dashes through stopped traffic, carrying a decoy, with an agent in hot pursuit. Acting as a thief, 24-year-old Agent Smith jumps out of the bushes and rushes the finish line with a blocker and three decoys running interference. Smith is tagged but a sloppy FBI search leaves the jewels, taped to the inner rim of the lid of the briefcase, undiscovered. It is the thieves' day.

"We are a nation, not of men, but of laws. The law must be enforced at all cost," says Smith through his impassive sunglasses. "But being a thief filled me with fear and unknown exhilaration."

During the third and final game, secret agent Speedbump apprehends a thief and wrestles the briefcase out of his uncooperative grip in the middle of an intersection. A cable-car load of tourists erupts in violent applause. Something to write home about. Street vendors begin to offer secret-agent discounts. Briefcases are tossed over the heads of people waiting in lines from thief to thief, with agents in hot pursuit. Witnesses ask to join in the game. And eventually that is how the day is won, with the jewels nestled inside a ham sandwich, wrapped in a paper bag, inside a brief case, shoved in a backpack, on the shoulder of a 16-year-old kid who walks up to the finish line and casually sits down on the bench next to the ever-vigilant FBI. The kid gets a \$5 payoff, but no doubt he'd have done it for free. The FBI is completely undone.

From opposite teams, Toast and Jam grin. Ingenuity is the name of the game. And location.

And the next game? You wouldn't believe me if I told you.



Above: More Smuggler action, confusing the tourists and amusing (or annoying) the locals.

**Helicopter as Opening Act for Drag Nuns**

Sister Kitty Catalyst

In 1995, the year the center circle at BunRingMan started to implode, new recruits Sister Dana Van Iquity and Sister Kitty Catalyst OCP were recruited to emcee the man stage and to perform the Sister Shock Show. Previously that night they had hosted Oh! Communion with medicinal brownies, eventually falling into a pool of absinthe. Late into the proceedings, the duo was corralled and commanded to pull the show back in from an incoming helicopter Medevac. The stage lights were needed to land and load the whirly-bird. The trouper holy clowns stood in the face of the gale force thrusts of air which sent Sister Dana's wimple tumble-weeding across stage while wedging playa dust into place where none had been. The show must go on! As the flight went up, the stage front lights threw on and the Sister Shock Show delivered shock and awe.



**ROUGH DRAFT** Issue #151 April 1999  
 The Official Organ of the San Francisco Cacophony Society.  
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The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences outside the mainstream. We are the bug under the rug, the termites in society's crutches, the bad egg at the corporate picnic, the vital spirits of cultural fermentation. You may already be a member!

**APRIL EVENTS**

**Saint Stupid's Day Parade**  
 If we don't get it right this time, we'll have to start the program over again next year. Bring noisemakers, old lottery tickets, socks to exchange and pennies for the banker's heart. Dress like Stupid.

When: Thursday, April 1st, Noon  
 Meet at Embarcadero Plaza at the foot of Market St. For those technically inclined, aim your bowzer at <http://www.saintstupid.com>

**Go Directly to Hell**  
 The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence will be holding their 20th anniversary party on Castro Street this Easter Sunday. We will add to the fun with a roving confessional booth and play some special games like "Rope a Pope" and "Guess What's Under The Robe". During the merriment, we will read from the Good Book while the Holiday Whores present the Easter Peeps Show and the Bad Bunny hands out triple-x eggs containing condoms and images from Naughty Santa's magazine collection.

When: Sunday, April 4th, Noon to 5 pm  
 Where: Castro Street between Market and 18th. Meet in front of the Castro Theater at 1 pm. Call Cacophony at 415-665- to coordinate activities and ideas. This religious observance organized by Father Phuccor Phaster and Sister Moe Lestor. Wear your Sunday best or just come nude to enter the Hunky Jesus contest.

Above: Sisters Kitty Catalyst and Dana Van Iquity sharing their thoughts with any and all within earshot at a Cacophony outing. Below: One of the many *Rough Drafts* edited by the sybaritic Sisters.

**Space Walk in the Mission**

Feel like taking a tiptoe walk through the Mission at three in the morning with a couple hundred whacked out artists in clown makeup who have been up for days on end creating strange pieces of mobile artwork? I thought so. Here's the skinny: The Community Spacewalk will take place over 24 solid hours across 63 blocks of the Mission District with over 200 artists (folks from No Limits for Women in the Arts, Food Not Bombs, the Aerial Action Team, The SF Art Institute, Burning Man, and The Cacophony Society.) Silke Tudor, *SF Weekly*, Oct 22-28, 1997

Kurt Bier, *New Mission News*, November, 1997

Was the Circus in town, or the gypsies, or Cirque du Soleil? Wait, is it one of those Burning Man things? No, couldn't be that cause nobody asked me for seventy-five bucks, but it is an event within the purview of the Burning Man plume, and a logical follow up to the recent *Defenestration* project in SOMA. It is the first annual "24 Hour Spacewalk," with the Mission chosen as its stomping ground, in an attempt to fuse art into reality, for at least 24 hours.

Most in the crowd seem to be regulars at these kind of events... an assembly of more than a hundred has gathered at the corner of 16th and Harrison Sts. The CyberBuss, a small school bus painted silver, pulls up to the curb. On top of the bus is a loosely constructed corral; drummers drum. On the hood a devil and a superhero make out. From within, a man painted red appears, carrying a boom box wrapped in duct tape, booming Led Zeppelin. A woman climbs a telephone pole and thrusts her hips to the beat of the drums. The crowd cheers: "Let's have some fucking fun!!!" Art cars pull up, one after the other. An old white ambulance that's tricked

out for Halloween elicits howls from the crowd. Molotov Malcontent, of the Mission Sideshow, watches it all with a short smile. "This is our act on training wheels," he explains. "This is an easy audience, but to really subvert paradigms, to assert the changes we want, we need to take this show to the Financial District." There it could create more contrast, disrupt big business."

Speaking of disruption, here come the police. A cruiser rolls down 16th St. and drifts closer to the crowd. A hand emerges from an open window and waves, politely. Suddenly, spotlights play off the side of the brick building across the street. Lo and behold, from over the edge of the roof drops Norma Jean, fuchsia hair flying, flanked by members of the Society of Superheroes. She trickles down the wall like a drop of Kool-Aid and upon landing, is whisked away by an angel with a walky-talky and a bespectacled jester. This is the midnight appearance of Warrior Girl, where she changes from super star to super hero. "Everyone's a superstar and everyone's a superhero. We just have to discover the superhero inside us. That's what we're saying here." The drums beat louder, cigarettes flare into life, and laughter plus conversation egg each other on. A police cruiser rolls by, slower this time, with tinted windows raised. Fortunately, scheduling demands a change of scenery and once again, the crowd disintegrates into the streets.

The Spacewalk continues into the night, and then the next day, dragging ever so slightly toward the end. By 1pm there is little evidence the event ever occurred. The only thing that recalls it is a gigantic bed in a vacant lot, where people watched movies projected onto an impromptu screen into the wee hours....



Above: The Cyberbuss provided transportation and a moving stage for segments of Warrior Girl's 24 hour Space Walk. The wonder of this event was drawn primarily from the novelty of performances and participatory activities taking place over a 24-hour period at multiple locations throughout the Mission District in San Francisco.



**Exploding Puppet Theater: the day AFTER 9/11/2001**  
 Danny Girl Waters

Exploding Puppet Theater was conceptualized by Kim Knight, Danny Girl, and Sam. The requirements were 'The 4 B's'. These were Blood, Bombs, Bowel Movements, and Barf. We staged performances at the Cyclone Warehouse, the Covered Wagon Saloon, and other venues. The show at the Cyclone was a 'Satanistic Ritual of Sacrifice,' which included a disembowelment of a paper-mache baby and removal of the entrails of the aforementioned, which consisted of beef tripe, intestines, and other throw away butcher shop items. We performed this show at the Cyclone, complete with vomiting Satan face rock wall backdrops. After, we cleaned up as best as we could, but due to the raw meat and decay left in the street, the promoters were displeased, and we were never asked to perform there again. The show at the Covered Wagon

was 'Fucked Up Family Christmas,' which was a scene of a sadly dysfunctional family, complete with an alcoholic beer drinking dad, and a teenage girl slashing her wrists in the bathtub. Other Exploding Puppet theater shows had Tightroping Barbies on Fire, and Exploding Wedding Presents. But the one most controversial Exploding Puppet Theater show was the 9/11 show at the Odeon.

I had been living in New Orleans, but came out to the west coast to attend Burning Man 2001. I then travelled to San Francisco to hang with friends for a few weeks until my flight back, which was supposed to be in the third week of September. While I was in town, Chicken John booked me to do an Exploding Puppet Theater performance at the Odeon. I was staying at the Cyclecide house, which was the old Green Tortoise house on Jerrold

Ave in SF. For days I procrastinated about the show, I didn't have a theme, I couldn't incorporate the 4 B's into any Idea, I was in block-mode. Then, one morning, everything changed. I remember I was dead asleep and there was a "bang bang bang!" on the door. There were loud voices in the living room, saying "no, no turn on the TV!" It was very early for us, 7 am. I could tell it was Bob's voice, very agitated, which was not really that unusual for Bob, so I went back to sleep. But then I heard Erin Pereuse's voice saying "oh my god, oh my god," and when Erin sounds shocked and concerned, you all better believe it's for real. I remember waking up to that, knowing that I better get the fuck outta bed and find out what's going on. So I got out of bed, and went into the living room, where I then learned of the attack on the Twin Towers. They were saying that the towers had fallen, but all of the footage was of the towers still standing, and so I was in disbelief. I was thinking: when the earthquake happened, the news kept saying that the Bay Bridge had fallen into the bay, and that was untrue... so this must be untrue, too. But then we saw the new footage. The towers actually did fall. So we watched the same film for the rest of the day. Over and over and over and over. I remember that my hands were clasped over my mouth, and I stayed



Above: Danny Girl — looks sweet and innocent, doesn't she?

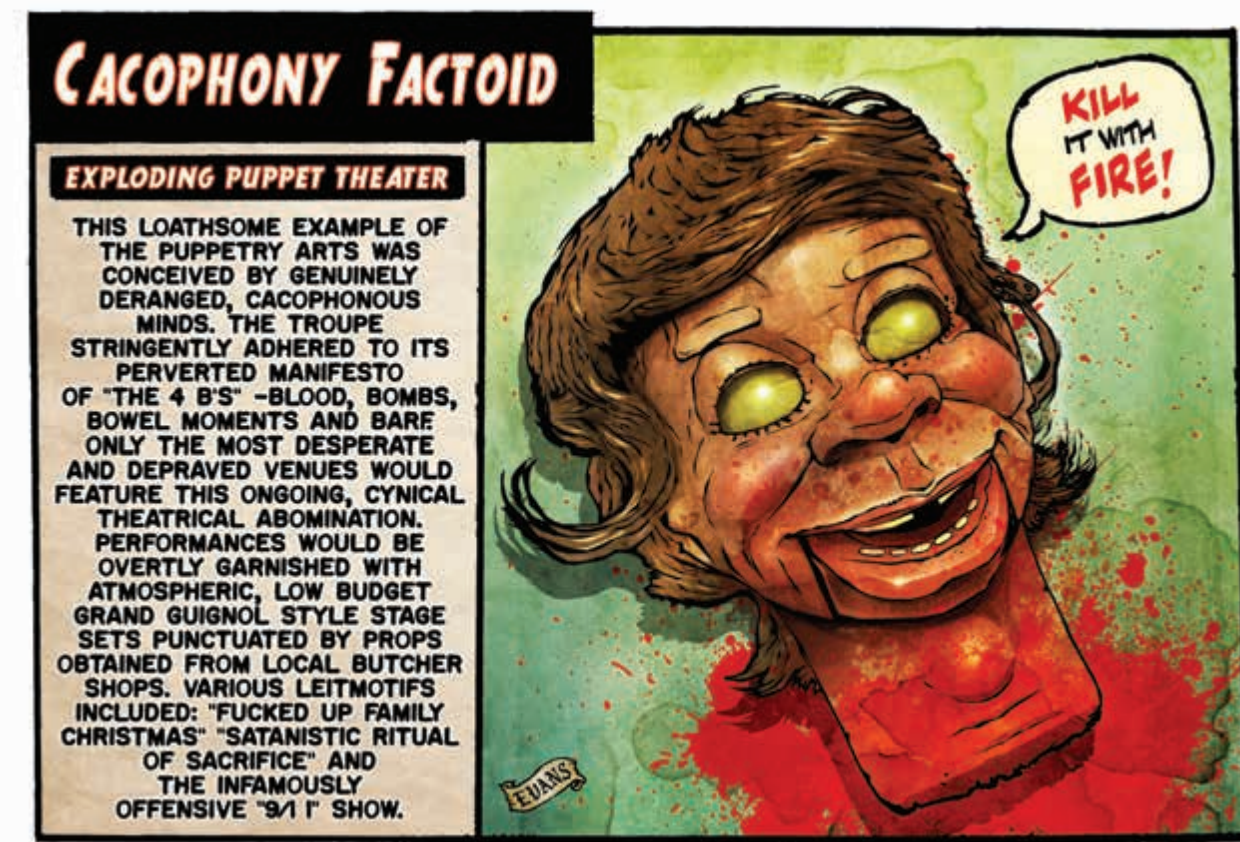
that way for hours. That night we congregated over at Kal's warehouse. We barbecued outside, and looked at the sky. There were no planes flying over, except once in a while military planes would fly over in formation. Kal's warehouse is in the airport flight path, so it was eerily quiet. That night, while talking to Jarico, Jesse Wack, and the rest, I suddenly knew what my Exploding Puppet Theater show had to be about.

The next day I gathered cardboard (the #1 ingredient for a cheap puppet show). Luckily I had tons of fireworks left from the recent July 4th redicklessness, and I had lots of gunpowder and fuse due to the fact that I was an incorrigible pyromaniac. So I set to carving two twin towers out of two large cardboard boxes. I remember being on the black and white checkered floor of the Green Tortoise for a very long time, with various people stepping over me graciously and patiently for hours on end. Thank goodness Jesse Wack was there to take on creating two very realistic airplanes, which he attached to the ends of two very long straight sticks. I acquired a package of little army men from a Mission Street dollar store, and I was all set.

That night at the Odeon went off swimmingly. People were in shock, gravitating towards their local bar for comfort. I don't even remember the other performers that night, I just remember me, and what I was about to do, and how

I stoically set out to fulfill my obligation to put on a show, no matter how, or why. The cardboard buildings were ignited as Jesse and Jarico flew the sad little airplanes on sticks into the fragile structures we had created to mimic the real fragile structures still smoldering on the opposite coast. Little explosions ignited as our fuses detonated, and cardboard went up in flames. Little plastic men leapt out of little carved windows, falling to their fiery deaths. People in the audience "boo'd," but we went on. More little men jumped out of windows to their deaths. The cardboard buildings were fully aflame by now, and as they burned, we kicked them down, to make sure the audience knew these structures and their inhabitants were not going to last. It was done. We stamped out the last flames. We retreated into the backstage area.

Eventually I came out to the bar, bashfully, as I knew I was going to get a lot of shit from people. Apparently a lot of people had left, being outraged at the callousness and indifference supposedly displayed by me, Danny Girl. Some remained because they wanted to make sure that I knew how horrible and insensitive I was. I was chastised and spanked and scolded, but luckily some people actually came up to me and thanked me, saying that it was the best thing they had ever seen. That they'd laughed in the face of tragedy and that it had helped them not cry, for a moment, and that was enough for me at the time.



**Incident report**

What: Devil's Night, Machine and Robot Performance.  
 Where: Post Rodney King apocalyptic downtown Los Angeles  
 When: Halloween 1994  
 Why: To Bring San Francisco Art to LA  
 Various witness reports:

**Rev Al:**

I remember making and distributing flyers, checking out the space, talking to Woodpussy, being impressed by the fake car wreck, seeing the line of people and being glad, seeing the police choppers and being sad. When I talked to the cops, I was with my girlfriend, who was illegally in the country, and when I said something they didn't like, they threatened to book us and suggested we evacuate. We cooperated so that my girlfriend didn't end up getting ID'd and deported or detained.

**Kal Spelletich:**

Our trip to LA was like a well planned military action: tools, food, machines, robots, props, busing an ever morphing crew and 10,000 lbs. of equipment, lodging, a kitchen. All in a foreign locale, behind enemy lines, if you will, but with the help of willing local collaborators and saboteurs. The promoter was rumored to have blown up a bridge or at least faked doing some such thing and gotten away with it. This is someone I wanted to work with!

But we didn't plan on one thing. Rodney on the Rock announcing our show to all of LA.

We were taking our Industrial flaming machine art performance to LA. For our first show down there, with a new crew and a whole new bunch of performers and robots.

The Police and Fire Dept. response was like a full on military action as well; must have cost the city of LA \$90,000.00. Three helicopters for hours buzzing us with their searchlights. Dozens of squad cars and fire department trucks. All to stop art.

Ten thousand paying customers tried to attend the event; for hours they tried to show up..

The show set constructed in the lot was comprised of: a life size wooden chapel with upside down crosses, a wall of neon reading "Terrorism" and other inflammatory statements, billboards of Patti Hearst, the Unabomber, and plywood cop figures.

At one point the cops are yelling at me to load all of our stuff, and get it out of there in an hour or they would impound it all. I calmly told the chief it took us three days

to install all of this stuff and it would take another day to load it all out. He scowled at me in disgust and stormed off. A GIANT linebacker-sized cop looked at Christian Ristow's Drunken Master and said to his other steroid fed partner, "Chief Gates would love this stuff." I knew then we running this stuff one way or another, sooner or later. I would be damned if we were gonna load 10,000 lbs. of equipment back into the trucks with our tail between our legs and drive it all the way back to SF without a robot battle and setting off at least one flamethrower.

Walking out onto the street during the mayhem of the raid, frustrated beyond belief, months of work and thousands of the dollars down the drain, I walked for two blocks to a police roadblock; they had sealed off the neighborhood. What did they think was going to happen? We were going to start another race war? The roadblock had barricades and cops with flares turning away a steady stream of cars and people trying walk in. Thousands of art hungry masses....

Further down another block, Chris DeMonterrey had set up a fake dead body/car wreck scene, complete with a shrouded "body", a crowd gathered around it... what a town.

Good... some art happened after all.

Then we did our private show for the crew and any stragglers who had hung around in the shadows or who managed to climb over the fence.

**Christian Ristow:**

Being only 24 and something of an introvert, I remember hanging around the warehouse space, checking and re-checking the Drunken Master, working on a few props, and not really talking to too many people other than Kal, John Law, and Amy. More than anything else, I remember the fucking helicopters. It seemed like they started around dusk and continued uninterrupted for hours. I sort of couldn't believe at first that they were there for us. They were such a stereotype. I remember hours later, when the crowds and the cops all went home, we had a pretty good time doing something that felt a lot like a mini-show just for ourselves, and how funny it was that no one seemed to care anymore what we did.

**Jason/Woodpussy:**

We had spent weeks on the indoor set, and then when the cops came, our drummer got spooked and left, which meant we couldn't even play for Seemen after the awesome private show they did for us.

That was the first time I had met any of the San Francisco folks. Flynn Mauthe, Jay Broemmel, Kal, Christian Ristow, John Law, Brian Normanly, and Amy Miller. I was skeptical beforehand. "Machine artists from S.F."



conjured up images of snobbery in my paranoid mind, so I stuck a vacuum motor in a metal can and duct taped the lid closed. I remember walking up to Kal and saying something like "robots, huh? I got a robot!" It was stupid as shit and Kal said it was cool and asked me all sorts of questions about it. I felt like a dope. These were the nicest guys in the world, and still are. I also remember the Drunken Master was so shiny and new! The styrofoam church. John's trip through the "terrorism" neon. The line of 30-some cops, all walking out after swiping a case of PBR each.

**John Law:**

I was so excited to see Woodpussy. I heard all about them and the meat. I had thought they were a band that used weird sets. Hmmm. They were a lot weirder. I met Jason Hadley and said something dumb like "Wood Pussy, I've heard of you. Didn't you open for that band... Splinter Dick?" BADDUUM...

**Jarico Reese:**

This happened just after the Los Angeles Rodney King riots. Downtown was really depressed, burnt out, and abandoned. Run by gangs and thugs. People kept away.



Above: Part of the outdoor SEEMEN set at the notorious aborted LA show, Halloween, 1994.

Above: The destructible neon set from SEEMEN's 1995 "Death of Rush" performance at Cyclone Space, San Francisco.

It was a hyper-violent scene there. It was right after the Darryl Gates scandal. As chief of police, he took a hardline, aggressive, paramilitary approach in fighting the drug war and Punk Rock. He declared war on Punk Rock! Fuck him, we thought. His aggressive tactics were highly controversial. Gates is often credited with the creation of SWAT teams and DARE. After the Rodney King beating and the riots afterward, Gates resigned from the police department in disgrace. He had an army of racist beat cops accountable only to his arrogant leadership. You have to picture what it was like back then. Anything could happen. I was 19 years old and got word about some crazy San Francisco art that was going to happen, like I had never seen nor heard of before. When I got there, the streets were jammed with people and riot police with German Shepherds. Three noisy helicopters were overhead shining their searchlights on us the whole time. The LAFD and LAPD called out every reserve they could. There were flares with roadblocks at every intersection for a mile around. This was the greatest show in LA that didn't happen. People heard about it for years.

We went to a phenomenal Punk Rock Mariachi Band after watching the raid.

**Amy (Miller) Jenkins:**

Many things come to mind from that memorable trip!

1. Rode down in the bus with Captain Robert Burk at the helm, smoking, drinking, and talking a blue streak the whole way. Arrived late at night to the warehouse and he backed that 40' behemoth into the tiniest of spaces, without even the slightest of problems - maybe even with his eyes closed. I gained all new respect for his skills!

2. Worked all the next day in the outside lot. By mid-afternoon: "Hey, weren't there buildings across the street?" The smog was so thick, they were no longer visible. By nighttime, we had crazy sore throats and eyes.

3. Hanging on the bus that eve, maybe dinner hour or something, Lisa Leathertongue hopped onto the bus dressed in Halloween full-on hippie drag: wig, beard, slouchy reggae hat, and bag, calling out WEED! LUDES!

I was starstruck.

When is the Reunion Tour?

**Erik Polczwartek:**

With trips to see Survival Research Lab shows in San Fran and the buzz in So Cal from initial reports from Burning Man in the Black Rock Desert, it became clear to me that



No Cal had something going on. An offer popped up for a Halloween event through the L. A. Cacophony and a band called Woodpussy. Woodpussy seemed to fit in with our edict of anything goes. An additional troupe on the bill was called SEEMEN. They were presented as an offshoot of SRL: a merry band of performers with machines and mayhem. To us, this was the holy grail, a show of all shows, something really different and progressive that fit in with our sensibilities as builders and craftsmen. And something downtown L.A. was yearning for.

As the date neared, there was genuine electricity in the air.

On arrival, as introductions and offerings of hospitality were made, I remember thinking this shit is gonna be great: a game changer for the downtown scene. And then when the machines and scenery started to be unloaded off trucks, and plans made, I remember thinking of the movie *Jaws*, when Roy Scheider finally sees the shark and his only response is "we're gonna need a bigger boat."

My thoughts were of needing increased parking lot size. Maybe the L. A. Coliseum Stadium; that would surely be big enough for these monsters of mayhem.

This night was going to change the face of arts in Los Angeles. An introduction to the psychology of machines and their human interaction through performance art.

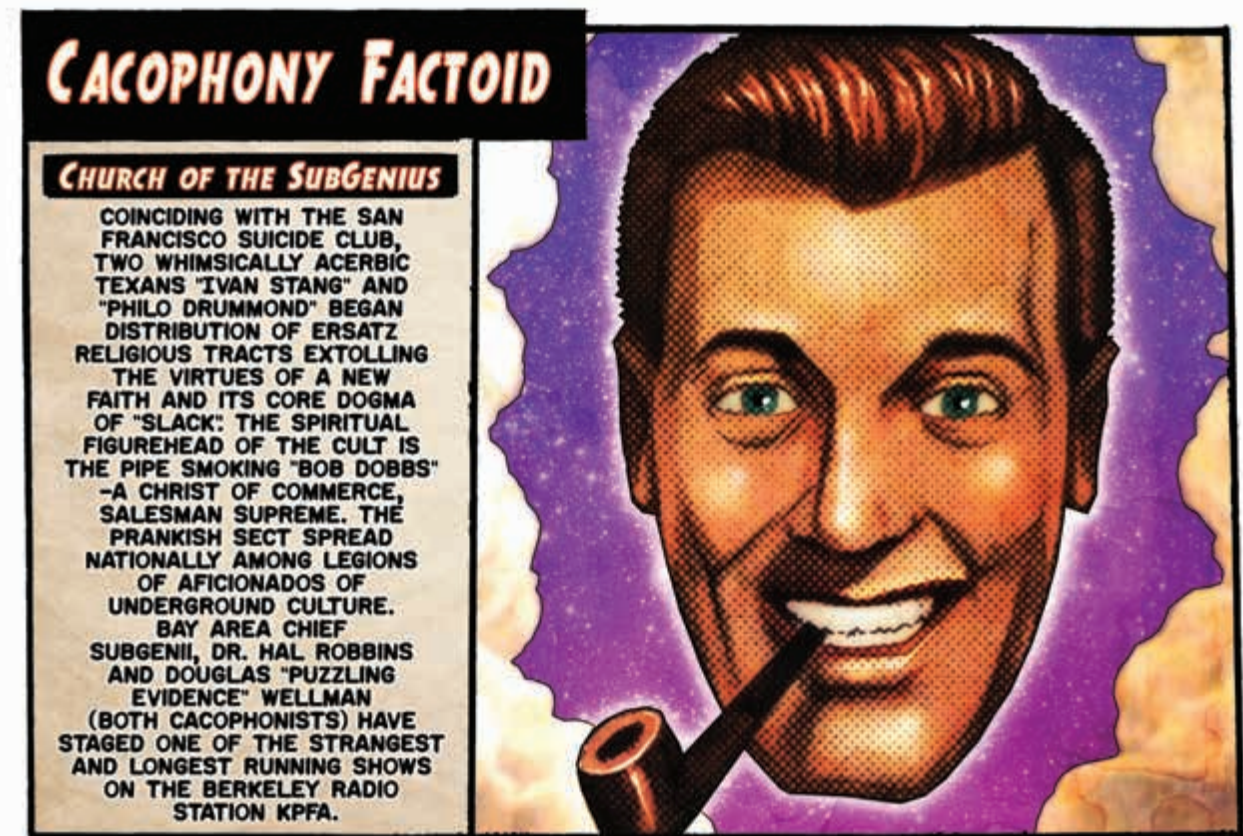
Earlier, for one of the clubhouse block parties, we had crudely built a flame throwing espresso hot rod that was menacingly driven through the crowd dispensing espresso. But this paled in comparison to what SEEMEN was about to unfurl.

I remember standing at the gate as night fell and not knowing that the crowd would become the zombie apocalypse. A massive line formed at the drop of a dime. I thought, fuck, we don't have enough beer for this. Friends emerged from the line grinning from ear to ear, expecting the mother of all shows.

Not so, not this night; as the SEEMEN were planning their assault, so was LAPD, the alcohol board, and the Fire Department.

**Jon Alloway:**

I arrived late, as the police were in the final stages of busting and clearing out several hundred attendees. Inside of an hour, all hell was breaking loose. The parking lot was on fire. Robots were doing crazy shit. It was like being in the middle of a war zone. I remember at one point during the mayhem, the cops came back. However, the massive fourteen foot tall gates were locked, and they couldn't get back in. The cops decided to just let it go, as long as we didn't let more people in. Cacophony at its finest.



Facing page: More destructible RUSH props at the SEEMEN-Cyclone event.

**Summer Burkes' "Dilettante"**

*San Francisco Bay Guardian, April 1, 1998*

"And lo, it came to pass that a table of four did sit and chat at New York City Deli ... in the city of San Francisco on a day in March 1979. And far and yon did their conversation wander thru subjects of art, life, politics, and would a blintz be good to have with coffee about now ...And lo, it came to pass some more that this one of four called Ed did mutter the need for a parade thru the temples of our land, the civic symbols of the power that bind us to a slackless life. And lo, the blintz did not sit well in his bowels, and his brain did swirl in digestive confusion and regurgitate the combined intake of thought and conversation into the words ... St. Stupid's Day. The rest is history."

The pre-history of the First Church of the Last Laugh, as related by Bishop Joey, seminal and secular head of the church.

San Francisco's first formal religion of the asinine started more than 20 years ago at the behest of a longtime Bay Area resident who calls himself Bishop Joey. According to the Bishop, every single human on Earth is a member of his tongue-in-cheek church, the First Church of the Last Laugh, since the only requirement for membership is the one uniting factor of our species: Stupidity. Thus the First Church of the Last Laugh is also the world's oldest religion, since "all other religions are based on fear and guilt, and before fear and guilt can work, you must have stupidity." This belief in the unfortunate, universal genetic flaw we all share is celebrated by knowing Church members once a year with a parade through the Financial District of San Francisco. St. Stupid's Day, the official holy day of the First Church of the Last Laugh, falls (not coincidentally) on April Fool's Day. On Wednesday the first of April, a friend and I, childhood Protestants and longtime heathens, joined a church for the second time in our lives.

Justin Hermann Plaza, at the end of the Embarcadero, has been the St. Stupid's Day Parade's ground zero for the past 20 years. Strolling down Market Street on April Fool's Day, my companion and I realize we've found the spot when we see a man in a dog suit talking into a fake cell phone. Another man in knickers and a top hat holds a megaphone and bellows repeatedly to addled tourists, "You are all winners!" At the end of Market, amid the construction and the suits on lunch break, we find the convergence. We mill around, costume-less, feeling horribly underdressed.

The ragtag crowd centers itself around an even more ragtag marching band, trading compliments and strange party favors. Within the first five minutes, we are handed dog biscuits and strawberries, solicited for three or four

fundraisers and political events, branded with little round yellow stickers, and stamped on the hand with a picture of a goat. Angels, nuns, jesters, fairies, and demons mingle and tend to their children and pets. A man stands upright and "sleeps" in a bed he made by strapping a mattress to his back and swaddling himself in blankets. Another man in an orange prison suit looks forlornly through the steel bars he has fastened vertically from his waist, brandishing a tin cup. Three or four people on stilts congregate near a man wearing no pants and a "no shoes, no shirt, no service" sign.

At noon, the marching band begins to play, accompanied by kazoos, whistles, megaphones, and general noise. Hyperactive revelers dance to the beat. The infamous Wavy Gravy, in a green Merlin clown suit, leads a plastic fish around by a leash. A somewhat conservative-looking older woman in a sports jacket strolls to and fro with her friends, seemingly oblivious to the bright pink sticker on the end of her nose. Bemused office workers in shades of navy and brown tentatively inspect the party and retreat to the periphery, smirking. After a short, cacophonous song, Bishop Joey addresses the crowd, briefly explaining the tenets of the First Church of the Last Laugh and then indocrinating us all. We raise our left hands, cross our fingers, and repeat after him: "I pledge allegiance to the illusion, and to the pyramid scheme for which it stands. One species, in denial, with error and excess by all." The parade, a procession to each of the holy Seven Stations of Stupid, begins.

As we march from Justin Hermann Plaza to the first Station of Stupid, we pass a fancy cafe where some businesspeople are eating lunch. One of the paraders with a giant propeller attached to his head ogles them, Rain Man-style, through the plate glass window. We come to the Federal Reserve Bank. In direct opposition to known parade protocol, the throng stops and sits down -- all 200 or 300 participants. Bishop Joey makes a brief speech, thanking the bank and all its kin for making America into a "casino economy," where luck, not hard work or education, gets you rich. He throws all his old lottery tickets from the past year (he buys one every day) at the front doors. We move on.

At the next stop, the parade crowds in, on, and between two 20-foot, levered, pyramid-shaped planters. Bishop Joey points out an unmarked door and tells us that it's the entrance to the Tomb of Stupid. He shushes the crowd as a man with giant prosthetic hands knocks on the "Tomb" to see if Saint Stupid is in. He's not. Again, business-suited types have come out of their skyscrapers to see what's going on. "Hi, normal people!" a few intrepid souls

holler as we make our way to the next Station. "Back to work! Get back to work!" A middle-aged man in a clown's nose trips and falls en route. He springs up, throws his hands in the air and shouts, "Blessed by Saint Stupid!" The parade stops at the intersection of Bush and Market. A witless chant rises from the throng: "No more chanting! No more chanting!"

Bishop Joey explains that this intersection, marked by the iron lug nuts in the ground, represents the border between old San Francisco and landfill San Francisco. This Station of Stupid is The Leap of Faith, an exercise wherein churchgoers close their eyes, jump up, and believe that when they come down the Earth will still be there. Members of the crowd "tighten" the lug nuts for safety's sake, and then, at the Bishop's command, the crowd jumps. The Earth is still there, and the skyscrapers haven't fallen into the ocean. Mission accomplished.

The parade moves to another plaza. We sit down, and The Parade Rests. A pig-faced man with a small accordion, eager to hear Bishop Joey's next message, screams, repeatedly and somewhat psychotically, "Everybody shut up!" The crowd joins in, and soon an entire plaza of stupidly clad people is jubilantly hollering these three words at everyone else, first arrhythmically, then conga-style. This fourth Station of Stupid includes a free lunch (boxes of cereal thrown at the crowd by the handfuls) and then some official Church hymns ("Hymmmmmnnnn...,"

"Herrrrrrrrr...," and "Usssssssssss...," to name a few). After a brief and unexplained march round and round the Citicorp Building's fountain, the parade settles in front of the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange for the sixth Station of Stupid: The Sock Exchange.

My friend and I stand near the looming Doggie Diner dog's head that's being towed alongside the parade on a flatbed truck. "So this is how capitalism works," my companion says to me as socks fly back and forth above our heads. Lacking socks to exchange, we instead throw our dog biscuits at the Dog as an appropriate offering. After chanting "Jump! Jump! Jump!" skyward at the suits watching from their high-rises (and then, of course, "No more chanting!"), the parade seeks out the final Station of Stupid.

The giant black marble blob of a sculpture at Kearny and California is the centerpiece for the last ceremony. After more marching in a circle, the parade settles in for The Blessing of the Banker's Heart. The few pennies that capitalism allows us to save throughout the year, Bishop Joey tells us, are to be tossed at the Heart as a sarcastic offering to The Man. After the Bishop flicks the first penny with a derisive and resigned "fuck you," a hailstorm of copper blankets the plaza and snickering choruses of "for they're all jolly good fellows" ricochet off the high-rises. The last laugh.



Facing page: Bishop Joey of the First Church of the Last Laugh flanked by meat at the How Berkeley Can You Be? parade.

**Summer Burkes' "Dilettante"**

San Francisco Bay Guardian, June 27, 2001

"How Lost Vegas Works:

Get chips at door.

Gamble.

Go to redemption center and redeem chips for valueless prizes."

"Lost Vegas" is area pettifogger Chicken John's annual attempt to further bastardize the sentiments behind the City of Sin with his trademarks: lowbrow sarcasm and controlled chaos. A couple hundred hip and zany participants have come out to try their luck. "Serious art" fills Cell Space's gallery in front, side by side with a "Valley of the King Wedding Chapel"—velvet Elvis centerpiece, Christmas-lighted proscenium arch, plant-lined aisle— and, at the start of the aisle, 25-cent gumball machines selling "Acme Wedding Rings" and official Lost Vegas poker chips. The dulcet sounds of Mongolounge, San Francisco's only lounge Devo cover band, echo from the main room. It's "Girl U Want" slowed down with a muted trombone.

Inside, two giant white dice twinkle overhead. "Last year I got married five times," a friend says, and tells us we just missed the Mongolettes dancing to a massive balloon-drop from Cell's second-floor balcony. The bar line is long, and a hyperactive, shouty bartender named Flash (who was once shot by a wayward lover while bartending in Nevada) backs up the line even farther by pausing to flirt with everything female.

Attendees crowd around the games. The Wheel of Smut is like roulette, but instead of numbers, one must shout out words: jism, fist felch, tits, ear, ass, cunt, ream, clit, cock, dog, rim. Thoroughbred Cockroach Racing features two critters from Madagascar that are supposed to race through a course made of fake asphalt, yellow lines, and gold foil toward the finish line and some finger sandwiches. Overcome by the mood of the event, however, the two racers have started to mate, so the game is temporarily defunct. The fetching cockroach handler, in red duct-tape bustier, red wig, red cheeks, striped thigh-highs, and white gloves, gingerly holds the loving couple in her palm along with a tiny sandwich, waiting patiently for them to finish and then have a snack.

The redemption center is like Sanford and Son's Skee-Ball prize booth. People trade chips for: a Santa hat, a keyboard, a sewing machine, an old car phone, a bowling pin, an adding machine, a baby doll, a rotary phone, a mini-chess set, some Altoids, thread, a comb, a lightbulb, a shovel, deodorant, a stuffed animal, a comic book, Birkenstocks, Spice Girls candy, cassette tapes, a remote control to nothing, a steering wheel, and a can of spinach. Mongolounge plays a cover of Lipps Inc.'s "Funkytown," and I pause again to watch the action on the crap table. People clap and holler as if the pennies they've put down were \$100 chips. Another friend runs up to us: "Have you seen the real white mouse running around on the Rat Roulette table? I feel kind of sad."

My companion isn't the only tart in the room: there are many girls here in large glasses, large wigs, large shoes, tight pants, and tight shirts. Balloons pop everywhere, adding to the sort-of tension. A fat cat in mirrored sunglasses walks by chomping a cigar, gut hanging out of his suit front. An Elvis tranny in silver sequins with a dollar bill rolled up and stuck up her nose, sporting a strap-on outdoors of her pants, momentarily steps onstage as if she owns it, poses, and struts back out into the fray. The definitive Miss Thing, in painted-on leopard-skin pedal pushers, tank top, saucer-size sunglasses, and sky-high blond beehive wig, minces by on stilt heels. "She is..." my companion says. "She is hot," I say. "White trash women always have the best bodies," she says. "It's that meth habit."

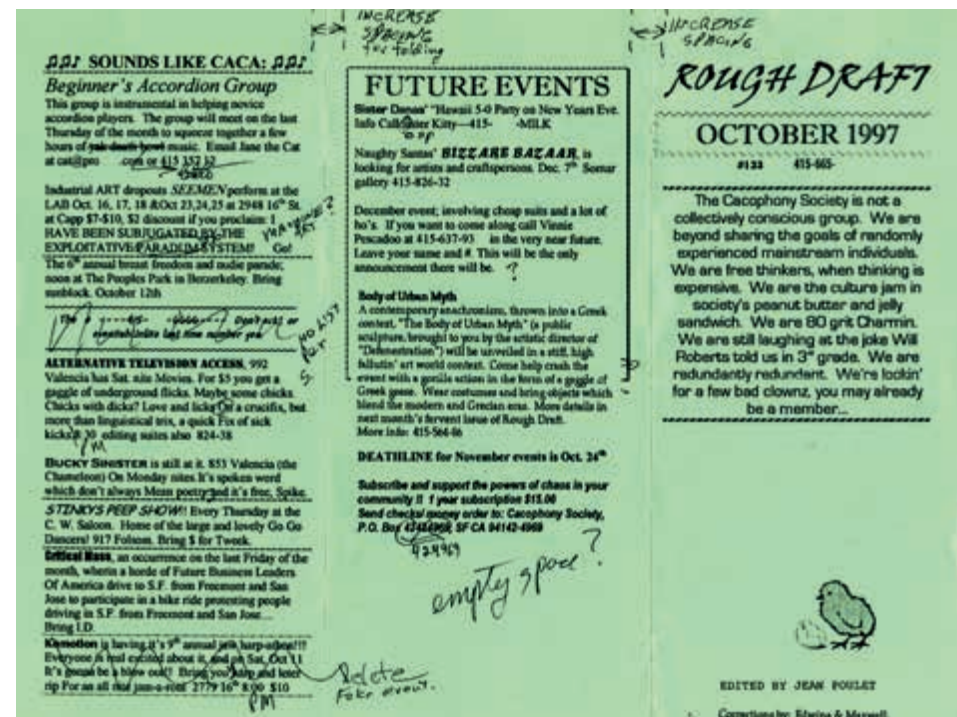
The best outfit for this occasion, we agree, would have been a middle-America pig in a pastel-colored flight suit, gym shoes, and saturated-fat couch-potato padding. If the tack were slightly different, games might have been called "Guess Which Toyota" or "Sell Your Wedding Ring" or "When Will My Wife Get Sick of My Self-Centered Sloth and Leave Me for the Copy Machine Guy at Her Work."

The super-suave Mr. Lucky comes onstage, singing (appropriately enough) "Luck Be A Lady Tonight," and my friends take pleasure in shouting naughty things at the Wheel of Smut. I help Flash tend bar, and the beers go fast and furious. The Devil-Ettes dance.

Chris Karney picks up the mic and MCs, revealing the shocking truth that since Lost Vegas didn't get the alcohol permit it wanted for the event, they've been serving nonalcoholic beer (\$3 a pop) all night. Incredulous attendees "No way" one another. (I already knew.) Karney then announces that balls to throw at the dunk-tank target to drench Chicken John cost a dollar. Cameras all over get ready, and the rubes line up to shell out even more money. Geekboy throws the contents of a giant can of baked beans in the dunk tank water and proposes that those who have to urinate can sweeten the sauce for five dollars. For \$20, Karney says, they have four cans of real beer to throw at him while he's going down. John Law takes the first ball, and on the fourth try, Chicken John goes down. Many people in the audience are extraordinarily pleased.

Geekboy then gets in the tank for a round, then a little sprite named Einstein, who also wears a strap-on. People take turns throwing balls, missing, then frustrated and determined, strolling up to punch the target and make the dunk anyway. My companion, having no more money for balls, takes off her considerable platform shoes and throws them at the target. I take a whirl, miss (of course), and run up to punch it. Einstein plops.

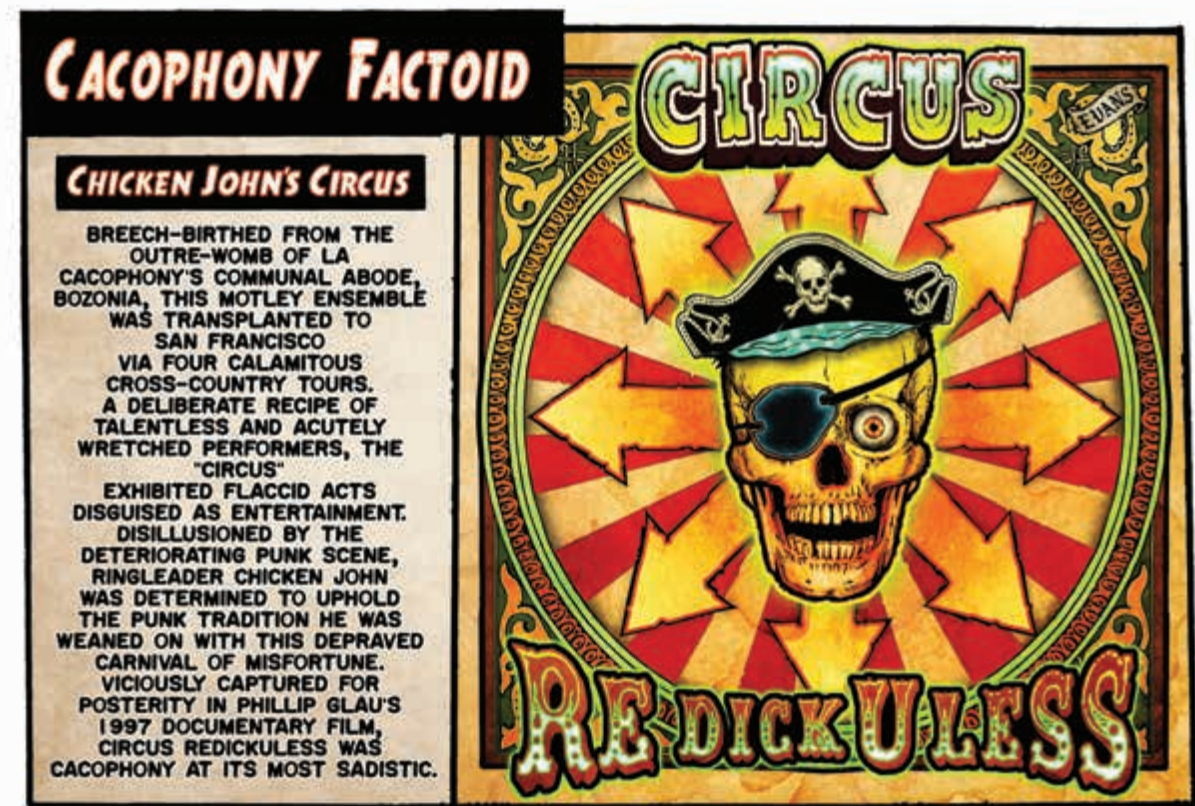
My companion surveys the scene and narrows her eyes. "As with all Chicken John productions," she says, "this event has degenerated into absolute cacophony."



Many things about Chicken were singular to him, yet very Cacophonous. He was the only huckster to continually use "Cacophony" to promote his own separate events while somehow keeping the original, pure, DIY spirit intact. A paradox, in other words. As Rev Al said of himself one time, "Special Child, Special Needs." The same holds true of Chicken.

Chicken edited *Rough Draft* one time. By the time he did it, M2 exerted a little more control over the very loose umbrella that Cacophony provided for so many. Some people were bridling under his soft yet insistent attempts to control their expressions while editing *Rough Draft*. Some people quit, some complained, some tried to ignore the control. Chicken received his marked up version of *Rough Draft* in the mail from

M2 a week before the shiny new copy corrected version was to go out. Chicken had (somehow) obtained the mailing list. He quickly photo-copied the red lined prototype and mailed it out to the hundred or so people on the Cacophony mailing list *before* they received M2's clean, grammatically correct version. A very Cacophonous solution.



**From Popcorn Anti-Theater's publicity**

Michael McElligott, January 1999

*"Popcorn is a lot like a school field trip with chaperones on drugs"*

-- Chicken John, Circus Ridickulous.

*"The fun never stops, it is like a comedic bus with no brakes. It certainly IS NOT theater"*

-- A.C.T. board member who refused to give her name.

*"It is certainly not 'Burning Man,' there is no community, no reverence or respect."*

-- Larry Harvey, founder of Burning Man

Popcorn Anti-Theater brought the night streets of San Francisco to surreptitious life at the height of dot-com boomery. "Variety Theater For Today's Attention-Deficient Audience." The fourth wall never stood a chance.

Popcorn took advantage of unattended outdoor spaces to stage short, immediate, unpretentious theater, beginning in 1998. Shows were at night, first in an industrial "park" and then scattered round San Francisco, with the audience shuttled from scene to scene in a converted school bus. In a time-honored countercultural motif, audiences got "on the bus" and embraced a commute into the unknown; immersed in music, poetry, comedy, jello shots, and other potent forms of creative human expression. Eventually they were brought back to where they started and had to somehow return to their daily lives the next morning.

Popcorn was an informal extension of Cacophony, in a similar spirit and featuring a few veteran Cacophonists. They also shared the goal of creating unexpected, unforgettable experiences for small groups of participants. But there were differences. Cacophony events had some theatrical aspects, but Popcorn (despite its "anti" motto) fully embraced the theatrical. Popcorn was also open to the public (those savvy enough to hear about it) and charged you for the ride.

Like all the best things in San Francisco underground "nightlife," Popcorn Theater was difficult to classify and involved a diverse group of people with a wide range of backgrounds. Stand up comics, poets, performance artists, noise musicians, free jazz groups, clowns, and dancers joined actual actors and the unclassifiable in plying their wares for whomever bought the ticket and took the ride.

Popcorn was founded by four people, most of whom had a theatrical background; Noona (an experienced director/producer), Aaron Treat and Jason Craig (aspiring actors with an absurdist bent), and Hernan Cortez (a street performer, Cacophonist by instinct and intent, and trickster of the highest order). They recruited acts from their friends, and audiences, for that matter.

I initially performed in Popcorn the month after first attending a show.

Hernan contributed manic energy, guerilla knowledge of San Francisco's urban landscape, and personal connections to a diverse group of artists and weirdos. Dedicated to manifesting strange and affecting experiences for both friends and complete strangers, Hernan has instigated many artistic and anarchic events in his time. But, typical of Cacophony, most have been ephemeral one-night happenings, brief and seen by few. Connecting with experienced theater types who shared an interest in experimentation yielded something that lasted for years. Hernan continued Popcorn, while the other founders moved on to other things, until 2005, more or less on a monthly basis.

The very first Popcorn Anti-theater performances took place in a single location, an open industrial spit of a park variously known as "the Cable Car Graveyard" and "Tire Beach." It was a mix of dying grass and gravel with a single, sad picnic table and BBQ pit, situated on the elbow-butt of an area not yet gentrified enough to be commonly known as "Dogpatch." More than a couple ingenious and borderline illegal events have happened on that real estate over the years. While it's a novel location for those who rarely leave The Mission, it's not too remote and in a relatively safe area (if you don't count the undocumented chemicals in the ground).

It also looks great by torch light, which is how it was lit—chemicals be damned. The show started "at 9:30pm (sundown)." "Donations" of between \$5 to \$25 were accepted, and a big pot of spaghetti was available if you wanted to sup with cast and crew post-show on that sad picnic table.

Short-form artistic outbursts need a tour guide, a theatrical sherpa to tie the loose collection of sounds and scenes together. That role was first filled by a candy-striped-suit n' porkpie-hatted pitchman who led the crowd through five or six scenes around the park ground. The surreal scout leaders that followed over the years included a French-Canadian circus ringmaster and an art-demented malpracticant named "Dr. Discount," amongst others. Popcorn's staff also included two ladies known as the "Pop Tarts" who vended alcoholic delicacies indelicately and were just as likely to drink all the jello shots themselves.

Days grew shorter and colder in the fall of that first year, and Popcorn needed a less exposed setting for their thespian undertakings. So they transitioned to a mobile model. Taking the theater on-board a bus had many advantages. A variety of widespread outdoor spaces

could be converted into "readymade" stage sets (in a Dada as well as convenience sense). Mobility also meant any trespassing and shenanigans at one location were shorter and lower impact, which lowered the risk of noise ordinance violations; the combined time for neighbors to complain and cops to eventually arrive was usually ample for the bus to be off to its next stop. It guaranteed the audience would be surprised, as they arrived at each scene, plus additional performances could occur on the bus itself. California law even allowed drinking on the bus, assuming the driver had the right license and booze was kept a certain distance from the steering wheel. And it was warmer, too. So Popcorn never went back to Tire Beach, except for the odd visit.

While the majority of Popcorn's scenes were played out in either industrial areas of the SOMA (SOUth of MARket Street) neighborhood or the outer edge of The Mission, the mobile party did find its way to a variety of sites over the years, from industrial loading docks to after-hour gallery invasions and ex-military sites across the Golden Gate Bridge. Once, even an overnight trip to Tahoe.

Performers over the years included a rocking one-woman tranny glam guitar concert in the park, perverse clowns, scenes from Harold Pinter plays, opera sung from high atop construction equipment, and a jailhouse confessional dating video.

Popcorn alumnae include the now award-winning New York theatre company Banana, Bag & Bodice (led by Popcorn founder Jason Craig) and Attaboy, a successful visual artist and co-proprietor of the well-known art magazine, *Hi Fructose*. Many other former Popcorn participants remain active in San Francisco today. And hundreds of Bay Area residents can never unsee what can be unleashed on a city at night.

Excerpts from a 1999 promo email for Popcorn...

*"Addressing the short attention span of modern audiences, POPCORN ANTI-THEATER is a collection of brief theater and performance art pieces staged in a "scenic" industrial location. Led by a troupe of vagabond musicians, spectators travel from performance piece to performance piece, each staged in different corners of the outdoor urban landscape."*



Above: Handbill and casting call for Popcorn Anti-Theater.

**Defenestration**

"[Brian] Goggin and scores of collaborators transformed the top three floors of a condemned hotel into an astounding fantasyscape that features several dozen pieces of anthropomorphized furniture cantilevered out from the hotel's windows and outside walls. Crawling couches, a snaking grandfather clock, several scurrying coffee tables, and an open refrigerator that seems to be crying for help are all presented as if in a state of suspended animation, suddenly frozen in the act of making a kind of prison break from their oppressive, instrumental identities. Titled after a 1618 episode in Prague

when some Hapsburg lackeys were given the heave-ho by a group of exuberant revolutionaries, this carnivalesque spectacle of quotidian silliness stands as a lively rebuke to the unfeeling sanctimony of institutional liberals, especially those who cloak private aggrandizement in the do-gooder rhetoric of public policy. It is also the most visible and permanent artistic evidence of a large and dedicated underground that has been percolating in San Francisco for quite some time, staging a well organized guerilla war of public satire against the institutional self-congratulation that pretends to improve everyday life.

This collaborative group of artists is affiliated with the semi-secret "Cacophony Society," which helps organize the popular Burning Man event. "Defenestration" doesn't simply announce itself as a conventional art presentation: rather, it reveals itself as the visible evidence of an elaborate subcultural value system within which works of art play specific, albeit mysterious roles. One cannot help but draw a parallel between the way this subculture uses visual expression and the way the Beat Generation used art and poetry. In both instances, an esoteric system of sense-making and sense-breaking binds an insular community of shared sensibilities. In "Defenestration" one sees a kind of Rabelaisian retort to centrist sanctimony as it exists both in and beyond the art world.

—Mark Van Proyen  
*Art Issues Magazine*, March 1998

There were at least ten spotters on the roof and fire escapes, as well as among the throng on the street below. They were positioned to stomp out any errant flaming embers that might cascade or rocket away from the building like the crazed furniture attached to the façade in a perpetual non-kinetic attempt to fly away. Given mere seconds, an unnoticed bit of burning debris in the wrong place could birth a conflagration ending the night in a somewhat more spectacular fashion than intended. Scot Jenerik stood directly on the edge of the roof corner overhang of the abandoned residence hotel at 1009 Howard Street. There was a rope attached at his back to keep him from inadvertently stepping forward and plunging to his death amidst the costumed performers and audience four stories below.

One lane of Howard Street, one of the busiest one-way routes in San Francisco, had been closed all day to accommodate the street fair and performances taking place, during what many believed to be the defining San Francisco event of the mid-'90s. Scot's gaze was fixed on the nearby city skyline with an intensity typical of a prize fighter as he lands the last blow in a title fight or perhaps a serial-killer in mid-slash.

The flames were lit and the whirling buckets of embers created an insane pattern as gouts of fire shot off into the darkness below and onto the kindling dry tarpaper roof

behind. Yellow red streamers created patterns over fifty feet in circumference, as Scot spun madly and with an almost superhuman focus and strength. I was transfixed, as were the others, and had to make a conscious effort to do my job of stomping out fires here and there while keeping an eye on Scot's safety line. One of the other spotters saw the police and firemen race into the ground floor doorway below. By then, Scot was finishing his performance. We quickly doused the flaming censurs, made one more idiot check around the rooftop for any small embers, and exited the roof through a far window well, just as the officials popped up onto the roof through the main doorway. All they found was various rigging, a sweaty harness, a bucket of water, and several full fire extinguishers.

If any event in mid-decade 1990s San Francisco defined that time and place in the universe, it would be Brian Goggin's *Defenestration*. Brian's genius for whimsical sculpture expanded into another realm with his imagining of this public expression of collective joy and creativity, street performance, and participatory spectacle. While remaining a fiercely independent artist, Brian was able to engage and encourage an enormous amount of collective creativity, allowing a free hand to all those participating. The spirit of Cacophony was never more present in any large scale public event.

Dream Circus's life play as theater and theater play as life creed informed *Defenestration*, as it did *Desert Site Works*. The way this group looked and acted eventually entered the mainstream as "burner" fashion and ethos.

Circus Redickless, Circus X, and other tiny, homespun and entirely un-funded "punk rock" circuses were in the house. The Hard Times Bike Club and Cyclecide represented the emerging "pre-cycled" bike scene. Circus Redickless and Cyclecide became the "Johnny Appleseeds" of this new punk based do-it-yourself culture. These touring groups travelled across the country spreading the idea that *anyone* could start their own circus or modified bike club. *Anyone* could make a show. Subsequently, dozens of similar performing groups popped up across the country. These groups, and many more, came together under the wild banner that Brian flew with the help of builders Steve Morganstern, Catherine Morgan, Chris Campbell, Morgan Raimond, Oliver Lowe and others. *Defenestration* was a model for dealing with the authorities. Due to the lobbying efforts of Danielle Engleman and Christina Harbridge, *Defenestration* became a political chink in the formerly impervious wall of bureaucratic suppression that artists would routinely run into when proposing and creating street events requiring official sanction. These efforts proved a template for procuring permission for future events that formerly would have been entirely underground or simply never allowed.



Above left: Magician and performer Bob Taxin escapes a straight jacket to kick off the day's festivities at the *Defenestration* Inaugural Event. Above right: Scott Jenerik spins fire atop the *Defenestration* Building. Below: *Defenestration*. This event was the high-water mark for collaborative street performance in mid-'90s San Francisco.



**Drive, She Said.**

Radcliffe was up the whole night, head full of acid, howling at the moon. He was sailing his VW Vanagon slowly in circles around the Car Hunt camp; the camper top was popped up and glowing from several lanterns swinging inside. He wedged a two by four between the dashboard and the accelerator pedal, holding the speed of the vehicle to a comfortable eight to ten miles an hour. He had tied a rope to the steering wheel, cinched it in the rolled up driver-side window, taut to the wheel, holding the vehicle to large passes around the camp. He circled the camp until just before dawn, riding atop the pop up shell, nowhere near the driver's seat and steering column, surf punk blasting across the flat desert pan and into our weary ears.

We had a big day ahead, with the culmination of months of work preparing the big Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser station wagon for the desert and its eventual death by gunshot. We had hauled it and all our camp gear out to the small flat desert playa thirty miles past the "Pavement Ends" sign in Northern Nevada. PeopleHater engineers Chip Flynn and Mike Fogarty designed and built the remote control devices for steering, acceleration, and braking, allowing the station wagon to cruise at speeds up to 60 mph, while providing enough mobility from the Futaba radio control box to allow the operator to drive the prey in evasive actions to avoid the following hunt cars and their rifle bearing hunters. We armor plated the

engine compartment and Pepe Ozan made plate steel wheels with rebar tread.

Kimmerick and Vanessa made a family of dummies: Ward, June, Stoner Boy, and GooGoo.


Bright and early, just after sun-up, the handlers and hunters convened and began the preparations for the hunt. Radcliffe was passed out in a mountain of down comforters, soaked in spittle near his head.

Robert Burk carefully painted a black bullseye on the sleeping Radcliff's forehead, while the rest of us watched over his shoulder. After everyone backed up to a safe distance, I backed a rental car right up to the open Vanagon camper door and after opening the driver's side and passenger doors, directing the door speakers at Radcliffe's wrinkled head a mere 15 feet away, turned on N.W.A.'s "Fuck Da Police" full blast.

He fell flat on his face, the comforter wrapped about his naked lower body tripping him up in a futile attempt to get at and smash the car stereo that had assaulted him. He sat in a puddle on the ground and absorbed the brunt of our collective "payback" mirth. It was well into the afternoon, and several passes at the hunt car, until Radcliffe noticed the target painted on his head. By then it was too late - all was filmed by Chuck Cirino for his nationally syndicated show, *Weird TV*, and there was Chris Radcliffe, hunter or hunted?



CAR HUNT!



CACOPHONY FACTOID

IN THE FALL OF 1995, THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY AND ANARCHIST MACHINE ART GUILD PEOPLEHATER UNITED AT A SECRET DESERT LOCATION NEAR LOVELOCK, NEVADA TO HUNT DOWN A REMOTE-CONTROLLED OLDSMOBILE VISTA CRUISER STATION WAGON. THIS BEHEMOTH WAS PAINTED BRIGHT GOLD, APPOINTED WITH LUGGAGE, AND POPULATED WITH A "NUCLEAR" FAMILY OF BENIGN MANNEQUINS, SEEMINGLY ON VACATION. THE PREY AND FAUX CONSIGNMENT WERE BRUTALLY DISPATCHED IN A SERIES OF HIGH-SPEED DRIVE-BYS. HUNTERS USED SMALL CALIBER ORDNANCE AT THE OUTSET AND GRADUATED TO LARGE BORE RIFLES AND ARMOR-PIERCING AMMO AS THE HUNT PROGRESSED. PHOTO REFERENCE: NICOLE ROSENTHAL

Facing page: Chris Radcliffe (Hugh Chrysler-Jones), sporting a Chinese made SKS assault rifle, white silk opera gloves, and evening gown. Black Rock Desert, 1997.



**The Car Hunters**, Safari Notes From the Nevada Veldt  
Stuart Mangrum

*All creatures kill - there seems to be no exception. But of the whole list, man seems to be the only one that kills for fun; he is the only one that kills for malice; the only one that kills for revenge.* - Samuel Clemens

*There is no class of person more moved by hate than the motorist.* - C.R. Hewitt

He is without question one of the world's most fearsome predators. Weighing up to two tons, capable of speeds up to 100 miles an hour; he can turn you into cube steak in less time than it took you to read this sentence. All other mankillers—the polar bear, the Bengal tiger, even the Cape buffalo—seem frail (and eat) by comparison. He is heavier, faster and more dangerous than any creature to roam the earth since the days of the dinosaur. What he lacks in intelligence, he more than makes up for in sheer brute force and unstoppable killing power. Each year his kind slaughters our own by the hundreds of thousands.

And how do we react to this carnage in our midst? We blame ourselves, terrified to admit we might be the weaker partner in an unhealthy symbiosis. We feed, bathe, and shelter the beast, under the pretense that he is our servant, often tending his needs at the expense of our own, routinely going into debt and occasionally even to war to satisfy his insatiable appetite. We know he is a killer, but we are so utterly reliant on him that we cannot bear to break free. Lovestruck, we forgive and forget.

Deep in the grip of co-dependency, we absolve him of guilt, and look the other way, while he goes on killing.

It takes a special kind of hunter to take down one of these vicious brutes, and when the opportunity arose, I had no choice but to leap the guardrail and meet it head on. Did I have the right stuff? Was I man enough? There was only one way to find out. The alternative was not even worth considering. If I stayed home, I knew I would have to look a coward in the mirror every morning for the rest of my life. Better a hunter's death than that, I thought. Better to be ground into potted food product by four thousand unreasoning pounds of rogue bull Oldsmobile.

I embarked at the crack of noon, piling my gear into the German RV of my close friend and confidant, Huge Chrysler-Jones. The skies were leaden, heavy with smog, and the other drivers seemed jittery. Cruising up Interstate 80 toward the Nevada border, past innumerable new construction projects that could have been either shopping malls or prisons—it was impossible to tell—I couldn't help but reflect on the day's news: a pick up truck had crashed through the fence at an Oakland daycare center, killing one child and critically injuring others. The eighteen-year old driver had been questioned and released, leaving only one possible suspect in the tragedy: a late model GMC stepside. His arrogant grille dominated the front page as he squatted over the sandbox, grinning back at his accusers, a hot



Above: The Car Hunt Car, a 1975 Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser station wagon, before the hunt.

young buck drunk on human blood.

In Reno, under a sky full of lenticular clouds that looked exactly like flying saucers, we stopped in a strip mall for ammo. We piled the counter high with .357 and .44 magnum, 7.62-39, and 12 gauge sabot slugs. No plinking this trip. We needed all the fire power we could muster to bring down that old bull we knew was waiting for us up on the high desert.

We turned off the road just outside of No Services, Nevada, under a gibbous moon that burned like a halogen bulb in the clear desert night. The morning's stimulants were starting to wear off, and in their place I was starting to feel something odd but not quite unfamiliar, a hunter's anticipation that seemed to come straight out of genetic memory. My sight seemed keener, my reflexes somehow faster, like the time I surprised a group of deer in the woods near my home and saw, in an instant, all the trajectories to their hearts, felt the flex of the atlatl and the sudden release of the spear, as if it had really flown.

We drank Commemorativo and celebrated the end of the pavement by running a few dozen rounds through Jones's Ruger.

The road was graded, but still treacherous in spots. In one high narrow pass, suicidal jack rabbits lined up to take their turn at the Westpahlia's hungry wheels, waiting for the headlights to pass their eyes before lunging headlong under her frame. Jones battled the wheel, but his ordinarily mild mannered vehicle seemed crazed by the rabbits taunting and could scarcely be controlled. We pulled into camp about an hour later, with death in our hearts and bunny blood in our wheel wells.

Our base camp was located on the northern edge of a dry lakebed ringed by mountains, a smaller and more secluded version of the great playa of the Black Rock Desert that is home to the Burning Man festival. One of my fellow hunters, Ms. Powerbar, noting its likeness to a deep dish pizza, christened the desolate hideaway our "personal pan playa."

My fellow hunters were an odd lot: an acid chemist, two insurance claims adjusters, a playboy pot grower, a torch singer, a dancer, a sculptor, a few businessmen, and my dear friend Mona Statsven, a stunning woman who lists her occupation as "sociopath." Each had paid 100 dollars for the privilege of blasting the shit out of a 1975 Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser station wagon with power everything, shooting on the fly from moving chase vehicles.

Our prey sat chained to a trailer just east of camp, heavily sedated and oblivious to the harassment of the



dogs. Majestic even in captivity, his mighty 454 cubic inch power plant strained at the bolts of his armor plated hood. His majestic steel wheels, treaded with lengths of rebar, glistened dully against the rough floor of the trailer bed.

I slept uneasily that night, plagued by evil dreams. I had unrolled my sleeping bag in the loft of Chrysler-Jone's RV, and in the middle of the night, the vehicle seemed to start moving of its own accord. There was no one at the wheel, and the stereo was playing "Surf or Die" by the Surf MCs on an endless loop. Through the half open flap of the pop-up tent above my head, I saw the silhouette of a Chinese SKS assault rifle, bayonet extended against an impossibly bright moon.

I awoke before dawn on October Seventh, the first day of Oldsmobile season, and after coffee and bloody marys took a brisk walk around camp to steady my nerves. The edges of the playa were rich with life of the hardest sort, tarantulas and cruel-jawed solpugids, stalking anything that moved among the archipelagos of tough grass. In a nearby wash, I found the bleached skeleton of a long dead burro, entombed in the dry mud next to an ancient distributor cap; a symbol, perhaps, of something that I was far too hung over to comprehend.

Above: Kimmerick Smythe and his flaming orange mortar. The barrel diameter was exact and unyielding, requiring oranges of a corresponding size. Kim and his father Bill spent hours at Safeway selecting suitable fruit using machining calipers.

Back in camp, the handlers were nearly done with their pre-hunt ministrations to the beast, which stood unchained now on the dusty lakebed. Fitted with special restraints and wired with electrodes by the evil geniuses of PeopleHater, a secretive gang of crazed engineers and social outcasts, it would—theoretically—respond to its handlers' every command. It responded, in fact, by promptly bolting for the horizon and had to be chased down, sedated again, and dragged back to camp for more unholy tinkering. I opened my first beer of the day and tried not to think about the ethics of kidnapping a proud beast like this and turning it into some kind of Frankenstein's monster, wiring its brain just for the hell of it, just for our cruel amusement. You've got to eat what you kill, my dad always insisted. Under the hot desert sun on the edge of the middle of nowhere, his words sounded prophetic.

When the beast at last left the blocks, he took off with a savage, snarling roar and a tall plume of dust, but this time we were ready for him and gave chase. His windows went first, showering glass in a vail of lead, and his lights were next. Huge and Mona emptied their 357's, and the rumble of steel wheels was drowned by the sound of exploding 12 gauge rounds. I held my fire until the second pass, when our prey was wounded and fully crazed, like a bleeding bull that has just dealt with the picadors and is hungry for vengeance. Shouldering my friend J.D. Boggman's AK-47, I took a bead on his right flank and squeezed off thirty rounds as fast as I could pull the trigger.



Above: Mid-hunt with one team firing from Pepe Ozan's pick up. Several passes were made at the prey from three vehicles with ascending order of ordnance: small caliber handguns to start, graduating to long rifles in the second heat and eventually assault weapons and large bore hunting rifles with armor piercing and exploding rounds.

I quickly snapped out the banana clips, inverted them, and went to work on the second magazine, but by then the beast was lurching toward us alarmingly, trailing fluids, and the Master of the Hunt called a quick cease fire.

The old bull ground to a shuddering stop with a round through his oil pan, a bullet somehow, and against all odds, had slipped under the thick armor plating on his right front quarter panel. Later forensic examination confirmed what had been clear to me from the moment he had turned his course in that last desperate lunge, flying at me with hate in his headlights: it was one of my 7.62 rounds that brought him down. The killing shot was mine.

Flushed as I was with the pride of success and the bloody passion of the chase, I could not help but notice that some of my fellow hunters, who had paid their 100 dollars and not yet had a turn to shoot, were less than impressed with my deadeye marksmanship. Even though the Master of the Hunt, Dr. Boggmann, ruled the kill clean and the shot a legal one, there was some *sotto voce* grumbling about neckties and the regrettable absence of trees.

Again the mighty beast was hauled back to camp and again Chip Flynn and his crazed PeopleHater crew worked their dark automotive necromancy. Just before dusk he rose again, ponderous and unsteady, like some junked up juju zombie, and lurched off on a last run for freedom.

It was pathetic. Weaving drunkenly, wheels grinding against punctured fenders and bent trim, he staggered across the playa at no more than fifteen or twenty miles an hour. We followed like a pack of jackals, unleashing an awesome and near-continuous stream of ordnance: .223, .357, .44, .308, NATO, 7mm magnum, 9mm, 30-06 and 12 gauge slugs. When he finally wheezed to a stop again, we dismounted and advanced on him Wild Bunch style, firing relentlessly until our weapons were black with powder burns, barrels glowing hotly in the gathering dusk.

In the belly of the beast we found the partially digested remains of a family of four and a clump of fur that may have been their pet, possibly a small monkey. There wasn't much left of these unlucky vacationers, but personal effects and a fragment of a gnawed, bullet riddled ID identified them as Ward and June something of Concord, California and their sons, Stonerboy and GooGoo. A quick records check by Huge on the satellite link showed no such address, and no missing persons report. The desert keeps its secrets.

Back in camp, our victory celebration around the oily carcass turned into a wild spontaneous dance. A bottle of Everclear was passed around, and a half a dozen hunters took turns spitting great gouts of fire. Agent Robert Burns, one of the organizers of the hunt, emptied a bottle of Beam and started juggling live coals while his dog, an exceptionally stupid Dalmation named Max, teased the chained bulk of M. T. Stein's pit bull, Moss, and went chasing after bullets every time someone stepped up to the firing line to unload another clip into the Olds' lifeless body. Kim the Pirate and his crusty dad, a retired adventurer we called the Old Bwana, took turns at the controls of Kim's homemade 75mm canon, a finely machined piece of work that shot napalm stuffed oranges in brilliant, fiery arcs across the lake bed and burned vicious, citrus scented blast scars into the doors and fenders. As the night progressed, the crowd grew bolder, advancing right up to the body and stuffing it with oxy-acetylene balloons, then retreating to ignite them with tracer rounds. Small bombs were stuffed into its body cavities and lit. Large quantities of alcohol were consumed, and even Chuck Cirino and his all pro, and normally staid, *Weird TV* crew, who had covered the hunt like flies on shit, howled like dogs and rolled in the dirt by the fire long into the night, drinking and speaking in tongues.



Above: "Give Peace a Chance," the nuclear family seems to say. Stonerboy in the back seat and Ward and June up front after the first round.

Sunday morning blew out of the Sierra like a vengeful Skylark, all bright sun and a supreme wind that sliced down the dry wash delta like 88 glistening Outlasses. As I zenfully swept up spent brass, I reflected on another night of unhealthy dreams. This time it had been the bull Olds out of control, coming back to life as the video crew and I sat drunk and stupefied by the campfire, paralyzed like rabbits in its headlights. Somebody kept chanting "Monkey, No Monkey" and laughing hysterically, as though gut-shot, while the steel wheels rumbled, and the monster slowly picked up speed. Jerkily, like some lab animals propelled by electric shocks, the other hunters lined up in rows on either side of its path, and just as the first heavy wheel crossed his line of sight, Sebastian Melmoth, our guide, leapt out in a smooth, graceful arc, rolling under the chassis and disappearing into the darkness.

Dr. Boggmann estimated later that we may have discharged as many as five thousand rounds that day, along with untold numbers of oranges. Melmoth and Burns insist that the carcass, though heavily damaged, is still roadworthy and that it will soon stalk the streets again with a new drive train and new glass, proudly wearing its bullet riddled vanity plates with the legend CAR HUNT. Frankly, the thought sickens me. Enough of this cruel manipulation—are we no better than cats, idly batting at a lesser foe for an eternity of casual entertainment, dragging his stiff corpse around with us like a trophy? Better to send him back to the Oldsmobile graveyard, where he belongs, to be crushed into a cube, while his own kind attend him in a grim circle, solemnly flashing their high beams and honking a baleful dirge, before turning away and slowly dispersing into the night.

**Wheels of Fortune**

Silke Tudor  
Night Crawler, *SF Weekly*, March 17, 1999

Two scabrous-looking riders roll through the night, down Third Street, ignoring traffic laws and dull backward glances from motorists. Their bicycles, driven forth by enormous leather boots and well-iniked calves, satisfy traditional expectations—a metal frame with two spoked wheels, two pedals, a chain, a seat, and handlebars — but the form is warped, slightly distended, as if the schematics had been created within a fun-house mirror. The first is too long and skinny, the other too tall and broad; they look like a kinetic rendering of Laurel and Hardy wheeling along the city’s perimeter, past Cesar Chavez, toward the inky water of the bay.

On a dead-end road, in front of Cyclone Warehouse, they join other abnormal cycles—uni, bi, tri, and quad—that send loose gravel flying over the heads of two women bobbing up and down on a Bike-O-Totter. Near the warehouse loading dock, four hobbyists with flickering twinkle-light helmets enjoy a game of midnight outdoor bowling while, in the distance, a sinking oil tanker wavers on the bay and an abandoned grain silo looms in rusting silence. A couple of youngsters come crashing through the surrounding weeds, smelling like a childhood memory of overexcitement and skinned knees.

The kids chase each other into the warehouse, weaving through the legs of adults, until they catch sight of a state-of-the-art dirt bike popping wheelies within a knot of mike stands, monitors, guitar chords, and drums. The older boy stops and stares, his game of chase forgotten.



Above: The Cyclecide Cyclefuge at the Yuri’s Night Celebration, NASA Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, Mountain View, CA. The crew got in a little trouble when one of their tall bikes was found on the runway, temporarily holding up the landing of the Antonov AN-225, the biggest plane ever made.

“Cooooo,” he says, catching the back of his companion’s vanishing shirt neck.

“So, what’s unique about your bike?” asks Jerico Reese, founder of Heavy Pedal Cyclecide, as a common-looking conveyance emerges from the crowd below. The rider pedals forward and easily hops his bike onstage.

**“No brakes, no problem,”  
is a favorite motto of  
both clubs.**

“Aaahhh ... the old Kangaroo Action,” says an admiring audience member.

Overhead, an array of unusual machines dangles from the rafters by unseen wires—choppers, cruisers, double bikes, tall bikes, tandem bikes, everything in between. On the ground, bikes in the form of sleek emerald-green aliens and rusty Geiger-esque dinosaurs line the walls. A young woman in a cowboy hat pedals furiously on a Seemen creation that resembles a carnival game. T-shirts, cycle-inspired self-portraits, and necklaces made of bike chains are scattered among the warehouse tangle of spokes, beer, and grease. John Bivowack, creator of the Keep Away bike equipped with multiple blades (to threaten new auto finishes and spandex-encased legs), stands stage right in a welding mask and gloves, putting final touches on a needy joint.

Another audience member wheels forward on a once-innocent machine corrupted by gold mannequin legs, a leopard-print banana seat, and a nasty flamethrower that erupts with four feet of fire. Reese and the crowd are thrilled. Someone tosses hot dogs.

A passion for Road Warrior misconduct and salvaged parts is essential for members of Cyclecide, which was inspired by the roguish Hard Times Bicycle Club from Minneapolis, where an ordinance now limits customizing to certified welders only.

“No brakes, no problem,” is a favorite motto of both clubs.

“If you can’t ride through a plate glass window, don’t bother,” says Reese, whose Suburban Intruder is a tricycle rigged with rotating lawn mower blades.

Bloodlust aside, Cyclecide is not without its impish mien: Erin Perusse, who created Double Trouble (a tandem bike outfitted with matching beer holders for those lazy Sunday mornings), and Danny Girl, who made self-flagellation simple with the Spanking Bike, are joined in front of the stage by Tamra and Lorianne, all wearing sexy cat ears, tails, and thigh-high stockings. Accompanied by a burlesque grind tape (sadly not from Cats), the bike-mounted kittens ride in a furious circle that disintegrates into a “cat” fight seen through a jumble of spinning wheels and vermicular handle bars.

The Suburban Intruder makes bird feed of several loaves of bread. Stuntman David Apocalypse jumps over five flaming Matchbox cars. Bike manipulator Jesse Whack presents the Hard Times Bicycle Club tuneup: Open toolbox, pull out beer, drink beer, clip brakes, cut off seat, slice through finger -- which he does, leaving a trail of bright scarlet blood (he’s later seen bandaging his wound with duct tape). Chupacabra -- the sleek alien beauty with stabbing claws created by Jay Brommel -- challenges a pinata, fails, and must be rescued by a unicyclist who lops off the insurgent pinata’s head.

During the much-anticipated bicycle auction, Reese is joined onstage by his boss at Ace Autoworks, Bill the

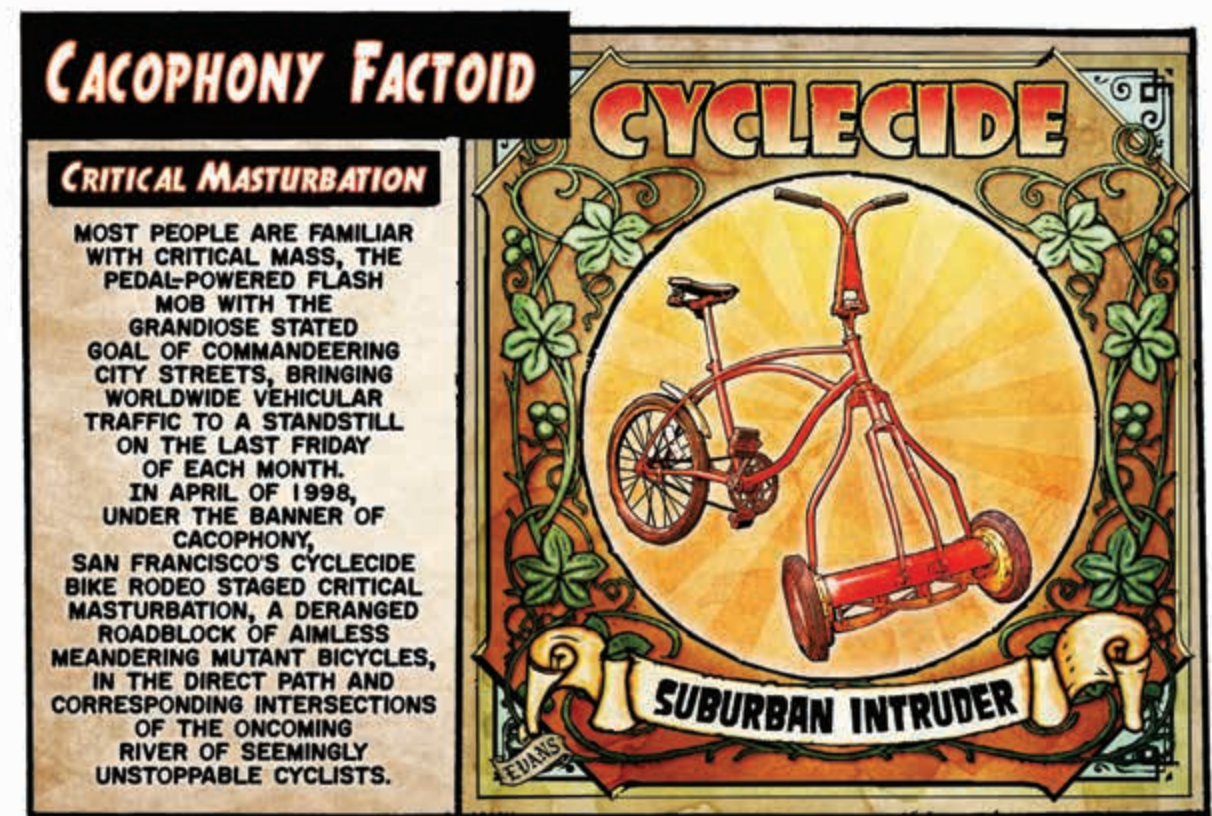
Junkman-cum-Auctioneer. While the crowd misleads the auctioneers by checking watches and waving at friends across the room, the auctioneers confuse the crowd by lowering bids (“I have \$450. Do I hear \$400, \$300, \$200. Sold to the little lady for \$50”). Reese gives away “a-bike-of-your-choice” to 8-year-old raffle winner Bobby.

Almost despite themselves, Cyclecide sells seven tall bikes, starting with Brad Silvernail’s double-decker tandem, but the real buying begins after the auction, during a cathartic punk rock set by the Junkyard Sluts. As Einstein— the Sluts’ frontman, who grew up at the legendary punk venue The Farm— rolls around in piles of mutilated bread covered in Vicks Formula 44, neighborhood guys and their children make deals with Cyclecide.

A grinning man, who wishes to “live, die, and be forgotten,” buys Ivan the Black and Free Spirit for \$80, less than it cost to build his own recently stolen One Eye—one brake, one gear, one day of use.

“I didn’t know I had named it so well,” says the man, still grinning as a flaming unicyclist rolls through the crowd and little Bobby teeters precariously on his first art bike.

“Remember, Critical Mass is for pussies,” says a cycle enthusiast, as he helps Bobby pull another bike from the pile. Art’s tough.”





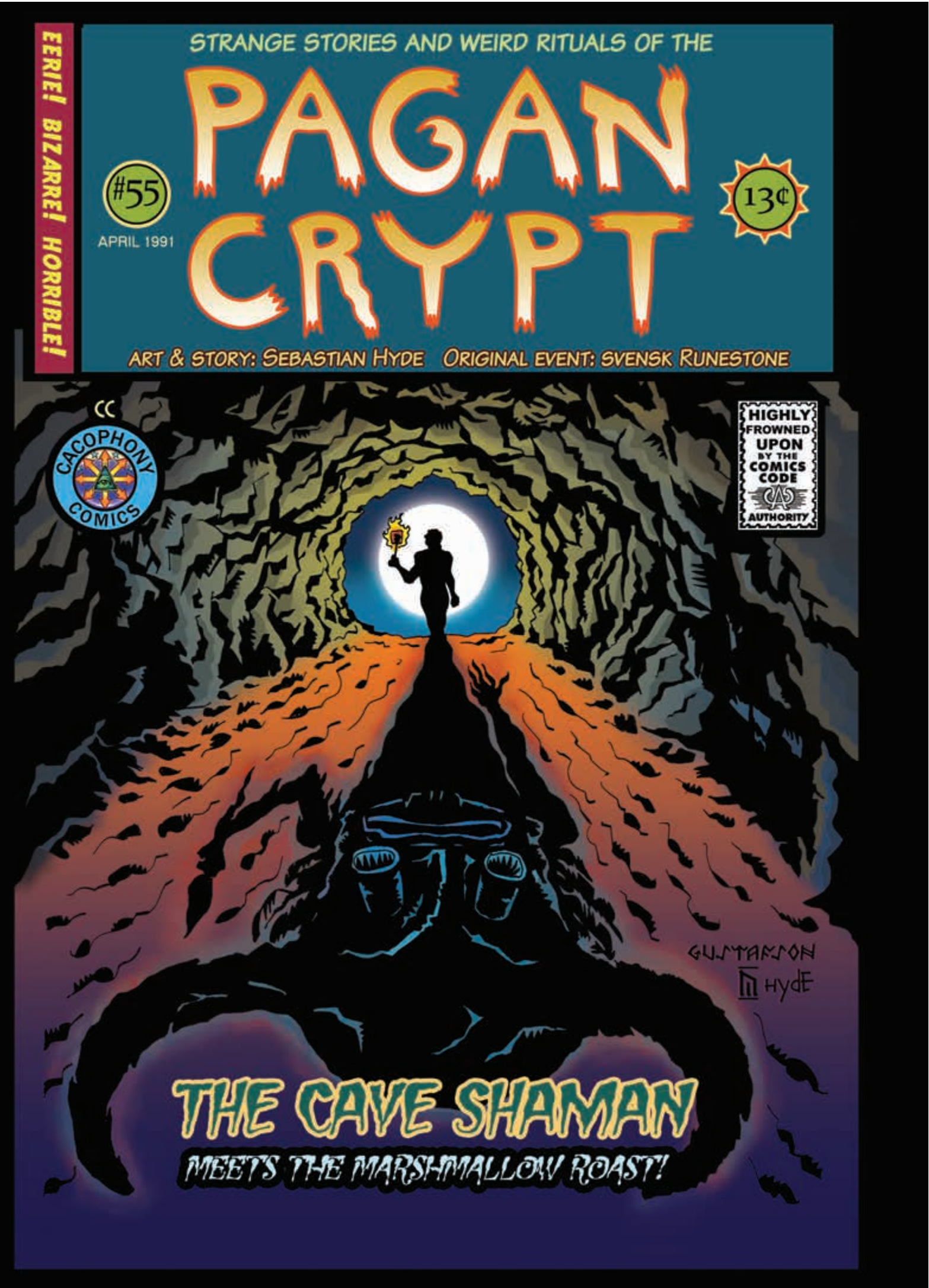
Above: Hunter S. Thompson effigy made by the Cyclecide crew. This photo was taken before the ritual immolation at sea to honor the recently deceased journalist in March 2005.

Below: Seven years earlier, Cyclecide honored Frank Sinatra, the "Chairman of the Board" in a similar ceremony.



The Cyclecide Viking Burials at Sea take place at Headless Point in San Francisco's India Basin. The last ceremony was for Kelly DeForest, the much loved roadie/performer with Cacophony fellow traveller Mark Perez and his Life Size Game of Mousetrap crew. Kelly passed away unexpectedly leaving much sadness at his loss.

The Mousetrap is a full, human sized recreation of the old Milton Bradley board game from the '60s. India Basin is one of the last unknown places left in San Francisco. It was and remains to this day home of the Mouse-trap and many other Cacophony-friendly events and artists.



# THE CAVE SHAMAN MEETS THE MARSHMALLOW ROAST

ORIGINAL EVENT CREATED BY SVENSK RUNESTONE AND NORSK ROOTEATER  
(DEAN GUSTAFSON) (JASON PUCCINELLI)

## STRANGE STORIES AND WEIRD RITUALS OF THE **PAGAN CRYPT**

STORY AND ART BY  
SEBASTIAN G HYDE

COVER LOGO AND DESIGN BY  
DEAN GUSTAFSON

COVER ART BY  
SEBASTIAN G HYDE

EDITORS:  
KEVIN EVANS  
CARRIE GALBRAITH

FOR DAVID WARREN

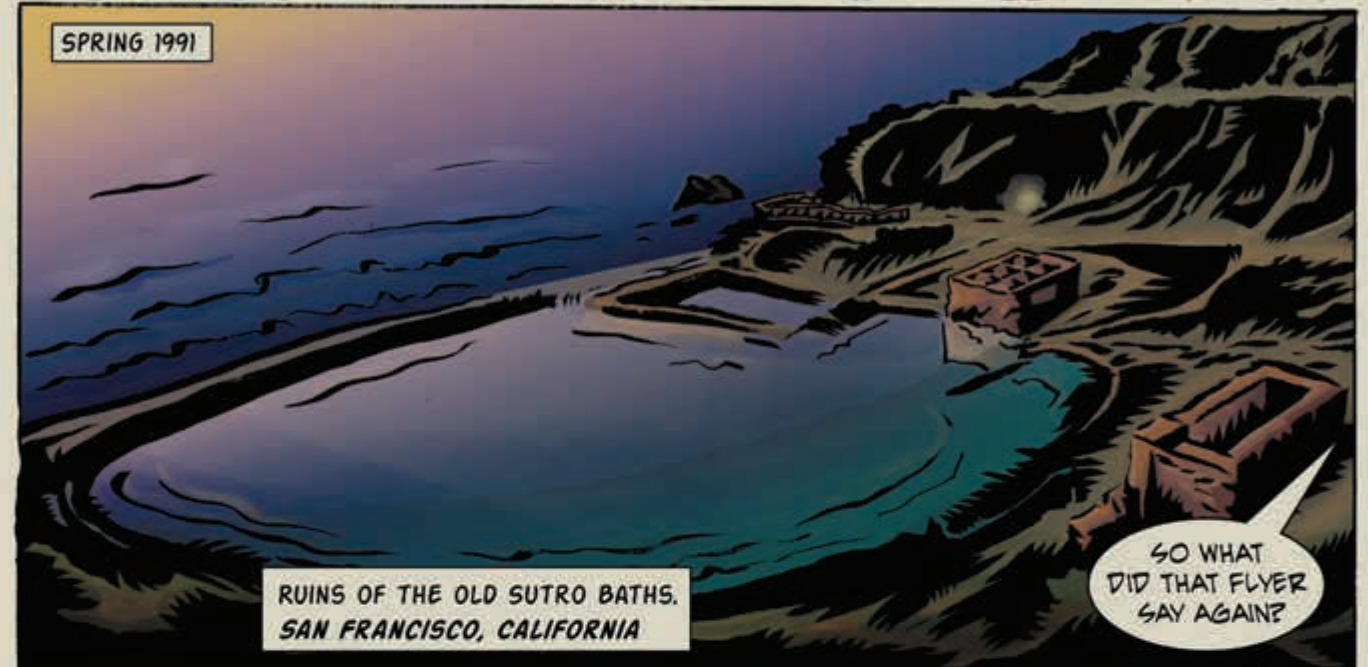


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MY NAME IS...WELL, YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW MY NAME. I DON'T USE IT ANYMORE AND EVEN IF I TOLD YOU, YOU WOULDN'T KNOW IT, JUST LIKE YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE NIGHT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE FOREVER. I WAS AN IMPRESSIONABLE SMALL TOWN BOY FROM NOWHERESVILLE, WASHINGTON STATE WHO FOUND HIMSELF IN SAN FRANCISCO, CA, NAIVE, GULLIBLE, AND WAY OUT OF HIS LEAGUE! I THOUGHT I WAS LOOKING FOR NEW EXPERIENCES THAT WOULD MAKE AN ARTIST OUT OF ME...BUT REALLY? I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR! A SCHOOL PAL OF MINE, CHET WIEDEMANN, HIS NAME WAS, HAD JUST STUMBLED ACROSS A BIZARRE NEWSLETTER THAT TOLD OF OUTLANDISH EVENTS GOING ON AROUND TOWN, AND ONE NIGHT WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE COOL TO CHECK IT OUT. A FRIEND-OF-A-FRIEND EVEN CLAIMED TO HAVE ATTENDED SOME OF THESE EVENTS, BUT NO ONE WE ACTUALLY KNEW HAD EVER GONE... AT LEAST NO ONE WE COULD FIND! WHY AM I TELLING YOU THIS? GOD ONLY KNOWS. MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I HAVE YET TO RECOVER FROM MY FATEFUL ENCOUNTER WITH...

## THE CAVE SHAMAN AND THE MARSHMALLOW ROAST!

SPRING 1991



RUINS OF THE OLD SUTRO BATHS.  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

SO WHAT  
DID THAT FLYER  
SAY AGAIN?



SOMETHING  
ABOUT A SILLY  
BRIGADIER!

TO BRING  
CANDLES...

...AND  
MARSHMALLOWS  
I THINK...

...IN SOME STUFF  
ABOUT ALTERED STATES  
AND SPEAKING IN  
TONGUES...

MY MOM HAD  
A FRIEND WHO USED  
TO DO THAT.



IT WAS  
WEEEEEIRD!

I'LL BET!



THERE CAN'T BE  
ANYTHING TOO EXCITING  
GOING ON IN THERE,  
CAN THERE?

I GUESS  
NOT.

HEY!  
DO YOU SEE...?

BEHOLD! ANOTHER HARROWING STORY FROM THE  
**PAGAN CRYPT**



WE DIDN'T KNOW *WHAT* WE WERE SEEING! OR WHAT WE *THOUGHT* WE WERE SEEING... IT LOOKED INNOCENT ENOUGH. SEEMINGLY A RANDOM GROUP OF STRANGERS SHARING AN *EXTRAORDINARY* EXPERIENCE - SOMETHING BEYOND NORMAL MAINSTREAM ACTIVITY. SOMETHING SUBVERSIVE, ARTISTIC AND *POETIC*! THEY WERE ON THE FRINGE, REACHING DEEP INTO HUMANITY'S PRIMEVAL PAST TO FORGE THE FUTURE! IT'S WHAT WE WERE *HUNGRY* FOR! *EXPLORATION! EXPRESSION! ART! PRANKS* AND GOOD OL' FASHIONED DO-IT-YOURSELF *ADVENTURE*! THIS LOOKED LIKE OUR TICKET TO PURGING ALL THE NOISE AND CLUTTER OF OUR MODERN LIVES AND TO FINDING SOMETHING THAT FELT MEANINGFUL! WE EXPLORED THE CAVE FOR HOURS, ENCOUNTERING ALL KINDS OF *STRANGE* FOLK, ALL FULLY ENGAGED IN THEIR WANTON SPONTANEOUS PERFORMANCES! HAD WE FOUND OUR *PEOPLE*? OR HAD WE FOUND *MADNESS*?





OVER THE NEXT COUNTLESS HOURS WE MET MANY INTERESTING AND COLORFUL CHARACTERS, EVERYONE TOTALLY COMMITTED TO THE SPIRIT OF THE NIGHT, TO REACH AN "ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS" WAS WHAT THE NEWSLETTER SAID TO DO AND EVERYONE WAS HAVING FUN DOING IT! BUT AS THE NIGHT WORE ON...SOMETHING FUNNY STARTED TO HAPPEN, THE FUN DIDN'T SEEM QUITE SO FUN ANY MORE! WHAT HAD BEEN PLAYED FOR LAUGHS EARLIER WAS APPARENTLY NOW BEING PLAYED FOR REAL!



WE GOT OURSELVES OUTTA OF THERE! THE NIGHT THAT HAD BEGUN SO EXCITINGLY HAD NOW TURNED TO SOMETHING UGLY! IT HAD GONE SAVAGE AND PRIMITIVE, MAYBE EVEN DANGEROUS! ON OUR WAY BACK UP THE STAIRS WE RAN INTO SOME KIDS. CHET TRIED TO WARN THEM OF THE DANGER THEY WERE IN. ME? I JUST FELT SICK...LITERALLY, LIKE A CHANGE WAS COMING OVER ME.



BUT IT WAS NOT THAT SIMPLE! THERE WAS SOMETHING TRULY MYSTICAL HAPPENING THAT NIGHT! SOMETHING BEYOND EXPLANATION! THERE WOULD BE NO MARSHMALLOWS...NOT FOR ME, AND NOT FOR...



CHET RAN OFF SCREAMING INTO THE NIGHT! HIS SHRIEKES ECHOING OFF INTO THE VOID. SHOULD I HAVE FOLLOWED HIM? PROBABLY, BUT NO...INSTEAD, I HAD *BECOME ONE* WITH THOSE STRANGE FOLK, THE ECCENTRIC SUBVERSIVES, THE CREATIVE MALCONTENTS HANGING ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ACCEPTABLE SOCIETY. WHILE IT WAS AN END TO MY "NORMAL" LIFE, IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF A WHOLE *NEW ONE!* I HAD JOINED THOSE WHO EMBRACED THE CACOPHONY OF RAW IDEAS, FRINGE EXPLORATIONS AND MEANINGLESS MADNESS. I HAD BECOME A MEMBER! YOU...MAY ALREADY BE A MEMBER!



KEVIN?



SUPPER'S READY!



KEVIN!  
SUPPER'S READY!

BUT THEN AGAIN? *MAYBE* IT WAS JUST A BUNCH OF COSTUMED *FREAKS* HAVING A MARSHMALLOW ROAST AFTER ALL!

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**Hey Kids!**  
Remember when The Cave Shaman met the Marshmallow Roast?  
**When:** Saturday, April 27th, 1991 10:37 PM  
**Where:** Sutro Baths Cave (at the end of Geary Blvd, Walk down to where the Ocean meets the ruins and turn right)  
We will attempt to reach altered states of consciousness through spontaneous performance in the form of shamanic tribal gibberish, speaking only in tongues. Invent your own style of ancient forgotten languages. If anything, here's a chance to be silly until the brizadrier shows up. Bring Candles, Toastables & Roastables (costumes encouraged)! Your skalds: Svensk Runestone and Norsk Root Eater!

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## The Events

“Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in places where you have experienced a revelation or had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience, etc. Dress up. Leave a false name. Be legendary.”  
—Hakim Bey

*For Louise Jarmilowicz, Sundays were almost invariably “creative days.” Carrie Galbraith often stopped by Louise’s house on those days to sit and draw, while Louise created collages or sewed. During those convivial afternoons, they often came up with ideas for events that they would produce collaboratively.*

*One languid Sunday afternoon, they began talking about a dystopian event: a bunker full of post-nuclear survivors, coming together for their annual barter party. It was simple, rooted in the dark fantasies of their duck-and-cover generation, and the subject of many films that inspired details for the event.*

*The premise was easy: survivors from outlying bunkers have come together to celebrate and create a kind of market, read stories and poetry from the “old world of before,” and sit for the telling of the “pox eclipse.” They had a wealth of cinematic influences to draw from—beginning with A Boy and His Dog for the markets and Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome for the “tell.” From this basic idea, Atomic Café was born.*

*The next part of the planning was reconnaissance. They needed a bunker, obviously, and they needed to furnish it. They enlisted several friends and proceeded to scout, on several occasions, until they found the perfect multiple-room bunker in the Presidio of San Francisco. There was only one problem with the location: the Presidio was still a working military base at that time.*

*Their solution was to buy their own locks and put them on the bunker doors, hoping the Army never had a need for the*

*underground fort. Over the next few weeks they scrounged tables, chairs, linens, anything they thought they might need, and transported it into the bunker to create the “café.” Carrie*

*had no trouble enlisting her many art school friends and arming them with paint and brushes; they sneaked into the bunker for two weeks before the event and renovated the interior, depicting apocalypse scenes on the walls, including a room with the entire story told in pictures. They paid homage to Bob’s Big Boy and the Golden Arches, painting icons in their honor. It was thrilling, and for many of Carrie’s fellow students, a new experience, as they had not yet been drawn into Cacophony.*

*They brought in a chemical toilet and set it up a discreet corner in one of the smaller rooms. A battery-operated generator and a cart with a 16mm projector came in the night before the event. Film appeared and was loaded. Candles were put on tables. They were ready.*

*The night of the event, they met the 30-plus participants, ranging in age from 13 to 60, at the southern parking lot of the Golden Gate Bridge, near the cross section of the cable. They had a pickup truck with a cab and loaded as many as could fit in the back, closed the cab, and headed to their destination, a parking spot 50 yards from the bunker entrance. The guide then led the participants, single file, through the brush, and then across a road in front of a manned building, to the bunker entrance: a door leading to a ladder going down. Each person entered quietly, and the guide headed back to get the next group waiting by the bridge.*



Above: Sybil deFenz prepares to serenade Cacophony on yet another outing. Facing page: Vivian Perry and Pierre, le marquis de Gateau in the San Francisco City Hall Rotunda after delivering the last crumbs from Let Them Eat Cake to the Mayor on a silver platter.

When everyone was inside, they shut the bunker door and enjoyed a night of literary readings, barter, food, drink, spontaneous stories of life underground, or tales from many participants of how they survived the apocalypse. They projected films of the above ground testing in the Marshall Islands and Nevada, and a survivor enthralled the guests seated in the illustrated chamber with a rousing, extemporaneous rendition of the "tell."

Then, quietly, they exited as they'd entered, and slowly became a group again at the bridge. After taking a group picture for posterity, they wandered, by car or public transportation, back to their real lives in this normal world.

They relocked the bunker and continued to use it for at least three more years.

The Cacophony Society created a space where any idea, any possibility, could be enacted. New members were encouraged to create events and offered help in realizing their inventions. Once emboldened to participate and assisted in projecting their dreams and fantasies out into the world, a regular person became something else.

Events came in all flavors and sizes. Some events were so huge they ran the risk of never occurring or getting out of control while in motion. Others were as simple as creating an "event within an event," or offering to the society a glimpse into personal interests, such as costuming, chantey singing, film viewing, and thrift store shopping. Many events sought out new and different ways to use the city as a playground. Midnight was a favorite time for exploratory events or game playing, gathering for a bonfire and sweat lodge on the beach, or engaging in a little full moon gardening. Some events were fake and used to spice up the newsletter or fill space when the month's offerings were thin.

Many events, especially early ones, went undocumented, an attitude held over from the Suicide Club's taboo of documentation and the credo of "participation, not observation." However, many of the artists involved with the society carried sketchbooks and caught events on paper with pens and brushes. As Cacophony began to grow, the members relaxed in this attitude, and not only were events documented, but often they were written up in advance and posted in weekly free newspapers around the Bay Area.



The exploration of San Francisco and environs became addictive and members sought out as many opportunities to investigate as possible. During periods of quiet when a week or two would lapse between events, the notion of the "spontaneous" event began. Members would call other players and plan reconnaissance of an abandoned building they had seen, or perhaps visit a park with cement slides on which to play.

Often, after an event ended, the participants would be too full of adrenaline to end the night and would take off to explore, climb, play, or just go out for an early breakfast at a 24-hour diner. The events were the glue that held the society together, and any idea conceivable was possible to execute as an event in the mind of the Cacophonist.



Above: Some events were accompanied by elaborate flyers offering further inducements for attending what promised to be a singular experience such as the above invitation to the Descent into Necropolis event. Art by Kevin Evans.

### Literary Events

Like the Suicide Club before, Cacophony events were often inspired by the writings of a vast array of authors. The influences could be, by turn, sacred, profane, humorous, dour, adventurous, romantic, or confusing. The occasional event was ALL of the above! Some Cacophonists' obsessions with a specific author, a genre, or perhaps a literary myth inspired them to create elaborate, obsessive events. In some case these events took on a life all their own; the facilitating auteur, impelled by voices in their heads perhaps, made it their life's calling.

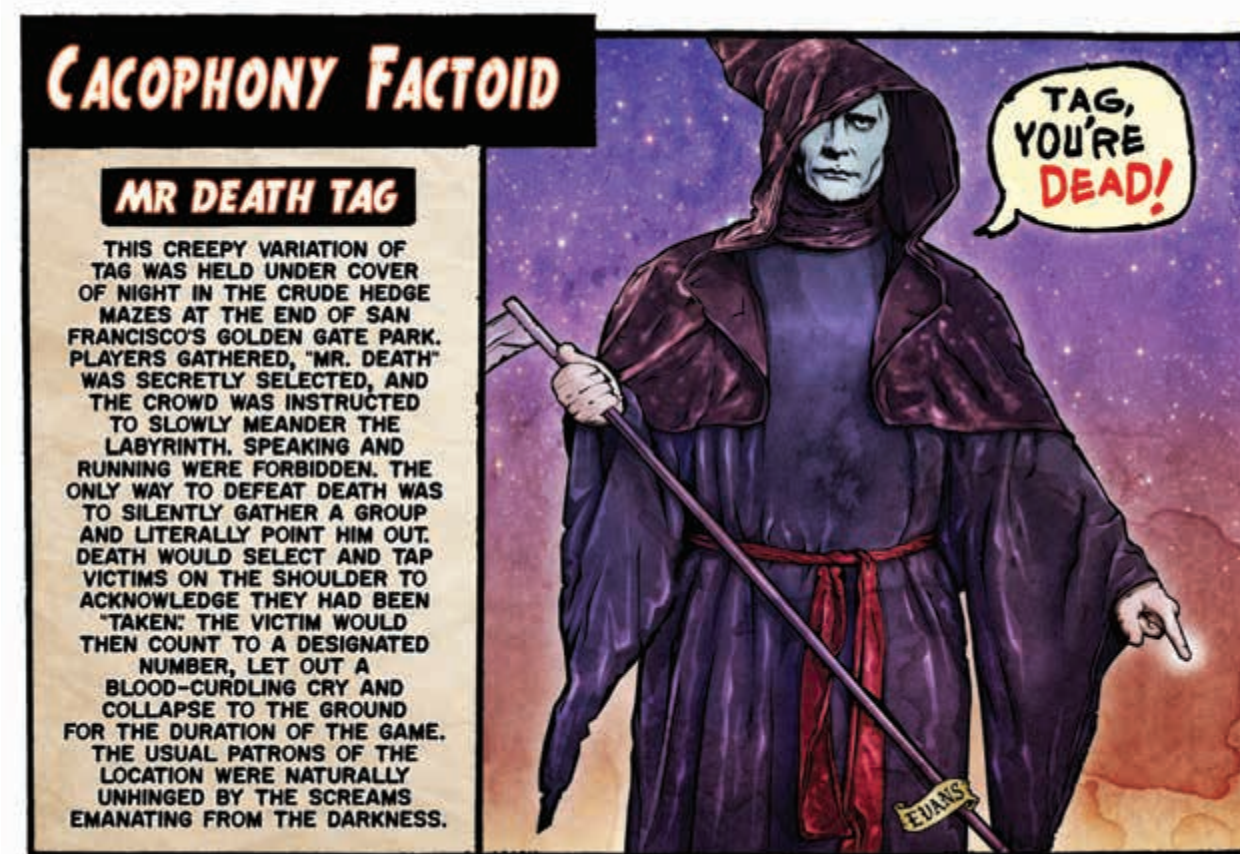
P Segal's The Marcel Proust Support Group, elaborate event, elegant soirée, and obsessive reading circle was just that. What Ms. Segal offered as a reading group for extant and potential Proustophiles grew into a life style and a career. Her protean "zine," *Proust Said That* grew from the reading circle. She opened a popular Proust themed restaurant, *Caffé Proust*, which paid her bills and employed dozens of waifs, waiters, and writers for years. She published stories and essays based on the life and writings of Proust. She and her gentle obsession were the subject of numerous press observances and a steady stream of admirers. Sebastian Melmoth and Celeste Albaret paid the ultimate compliment of mimicry and lampooning with their Cacophony literary circle, The Charles Bukowski Support Group, a reading, drinking

and puking confederation dedicated to supporting and presenting the work of the "American Proust of the Gutter."

Cacophonists would sometimes meet through event postings or informally for poetry readings while preparing elaborate pancake breakfasts. They might imbibe gin and tonics while reciting a rousing round of Kipling's Regimental Tales and preparing for a tipsy saber duel atop a pitched third story Edwardian rooftop.

Poetry and/or prose readings in laundromats, race tracks, grassy knolls, abandoned freeway ramps, sewer tunnels, and pretty much any environment the facilitator could come up with were common. The range and variety of literary events was limited only by individual organizer's taste and desire.

Perhaps Cacophony's most complex literary event was the Night of the Exquisite Corpse, one of the few events that came close to a genuine theatrical experience. This event involved an actual paying audience, a rented theater or hall, "actors," scripts, sets, props, lighting, and all the other trappings of theater. The Surrealist gift this particular divertissement offered an unwitting audience was the disgorgement of their own dreams, thoughts and vision, filtered through the collective mind and almost instantly recast on a stage right in front of them.



The Noe Valley Ministry, The Haight Ashbury Public Library, and The Victoria Theater were the venues for the Corpses over a span of 5 years. Initially conceived of by Jim Khennedy, Louise Jarmilowicz, and others, the Surrealist parlor game changed subtly when Ethyl Ketone and Louise Jarmilowicz were its hosts..

The audience entered the hall and was immediately confronted by a bank of typewriters, a large shelf full of curious props, and a list of character names. Each theater goer was required to sit at a typewriter and, while only viewing the last four or five lines typed by the last person, was encouraged to write their own staging and dialogue, knowing only the names of the characters and inserting any of the props that they wished to use. This exercise was repeated at each typewriter until every audience member had joined in creating the play. Snippets of the freshly minted play were cut up randomly by the attendants and delivered to whichever actor was named in that portion of the script.

An example of Dadaist action, dialogue, and stage direction: Zeus, while adjusting his Speedo and twirling his cape, dials the rotary phone, expecting to speak to his bookie. "Yo, Sergio, it's Zeus, man. How did Diaper Rash do in the third? Win or place?" The postman walks in stage right, points the Enfield 303 rifle at Zeus and says, "All your kittens wear pink mittens, why indeed do the animals vex me so?" Lizzie Borden in blond pigtails, carrying a hula hoop, shouts out from the chair she's been hiding behind: "What would Roman Polanski do?"



**A Tipping to Kipling**

When: Sunday, November 1st, 6:15 pm  
Meet: NW corner of California and Larkin  
Bring: Poetry to Read (see below)

Hail the nearest rickshaw and join an afternoon of poetry from the Imperialist/Romanticist/Chauvinist era. We will be reading in a British Pub, somewhere on the road to Simla. Proper dress strongly encouraged and a few poems (any poet from the era) to read are required. Pints and other refreshments will be available to those who tinkle in the drawing room. Your host: Mrs. Hauksbee (I'll be the one wearing the cameo).  
— Rough Draft, November, 1989

**Dada Picnic**  
A potluck get together, featuring a group reading of Tristan Tzara's Z Dada Manifestos, or if you prefer, write your own dada manifesto and read it aloud. Unusual costumes or outfits welcomed but not a must. Drop in and find out why dada is dada! and why it refuses to die a natural death, and why "we are all circus ringmasters and can be found whistling among the winds of fairgrounds, in convents, prostitutions, theaters, realities, feelings, restaurants, ohoho, bang-bang." (Tristan Tzara, 1st Manifesto)  
When: Saturday, May 21, 1 PM  
Where: meeting at Elk Glen Lake in Golden Gate Park, 1st lake on the west side of Park Presidio (19th Ave.) near Martin Luther King Drive.  
Bring: picnic goodies/drinks, a blanket to sit on, and friends.  
Your host: Ronn "Dadaco" Rosen, 415.

**Absinthe, the Potent Green Fairy**  
Stuart Mangrum, 1994

After languishing in obscurity for the better part of a century, absinthe is enjoying an unlikely renaissance in fin-de-siècle San Francisco. No fashionable party seems complete these days without hipsters sipping murky glasses of bitter green homebrew, or more likely dumping them into the potted plants when they think no one's looking. No wonder, really, that Proust stuck to his beer and heroin. Absinthe is an acquired taste, and a difficult one to acquire at that. I should know: I've been drinking the stuff for fifteen years, and I still haven't quite made up my mind.

My first absinthe experience was in a strobe-lit, over-amplified GI bar on Okinawa. What I drank was not the "Green Fairy" of the Belle Epoch but the "Purple Haze" of Koza City: a dangerous mix of gin, absinthe, violet, and sweet & sour that we'd drink after recon missions to wash the radio chatter out of our heads. Japan is one of the few places on earth where you can still buy absinthe over the counter, but as a US national with a top secret clearance, I was theoretically risking my job every time I ordered a drink. For that matter, I wasn't supposed to patronize the off-base drug stores either, where you could buy Valium and Dexedrine over the counter without a prescription, along with litres of medicinal ether and four-packs of Bron, that powerful, marvelous little speedball of a cough syrup. Oh well. As my friend Dr. Anderson always says, life without adventure is nothing.

Different bars in the village all served their own variations on the basic Purple Haze formula, with escalating adjectives to let you know how much absinthe was allegedly in the mix: Regular, Super, Special, Extra, etc.. My friend Takeo at the Rock House Purple Haze (actual bar name) created a worst-case-scenario he called the Big Fire, a warhead-like drink crowned by a mushroom cloud of absinthe that took up two-thirds of the glass. Surprisingly tasty, extraordinarily strong, and oddly beautiful under the black lights upstairs on Gate Two Street, where the walls were covered with photos and the stereo moved enough air to push empties off the bar. Two Big Fires and you'd better hope you lost your car keys. Three or four and you'd be hallucinating, and probably doing things you wouldn't remember in the morning. Or wouldn't want to remember. I woke up once in my dorm room, pants snagged around muddy boot-tops, tangled in purple-stained clothes that I couldn't quite peel from my stiff, aching limbs. No wallet, no car keys, no self-respect. Worse, the top of my head felt like it had been lopped off with a pavement saw. If there's any human condition more miserable than an absinthe hangover, I pray it never happens to me.



"GET DRUNK, ALWAYS. THAT IS THE POINT: NOTHING ELSE MATTERS. IF YOU WOULD NOT FEEL THE HORRIBLE BURDEN OF TIME WEIGH YOU DOWN AND CRUSH YOU TO THE EARTH, BE DRUNKEN CONTINUALLY. DRUNKEN WITH WHAT? WITH WINE, WITH POETRY OR WITH VIRTUE, AS YOU PLEASE. BUT GET DRUNK."  
BAUDELAIRE

SAT. JULY 16  
9 P.M.  
9TH AVE.  
SAN FRANCISCO  
RSVP. 668.24 . CARÉ

BRING A SELECTION TO READ FROM A WRITER/ARTIST WHO WAS A USER OF ABSINTHE. (late 1800's, early 1900's.)  
PERIOD ATTIRE AND ACCESSORIES APPRECIATED.



· ABSINTHE PROVIDED ·

Above: Snippet of a literary event write-up in Rough Draft. Facing page: Flyer created by Dog Boy and Caré and mailed prior to a poetry reading and absinthe party. The event was listed in Rough Draft but the mailers were a gentle nudge to keep the event in mind. The absinthe was homemade.

Yet despite all the mornings after, when I got back to the States I found myself pining for absinthe in the same way I'd once yearned for Mexican food on the other side of the International Date Line. Elusive and unobtainable, it just didn't seem to be at all available. Once a friend smuggled back a quart in a green plastic canteen, but it only lasted the night, and after that, the memories began to fade. Then, years later, my wife Michelle and I obtained a recipe from a friend in Portland and decided to mix up a batch of our own.

To be fair, the project really belonged to Michelle and Miss P. They did all the work, measuring exotic oils into a pitcher of grain alcohol drop by drop and stirring the whole affair with a glass rod while I lounged in a kitchen chair sipping red wine, scratching the ears of Marcel the cat, while P's roommate Lance, the smartest man he's ever met, lectured us all on the neurological effects of thujone, an isomer of camphor that is absinthe's key component.

That first batch was, to put it bluntly, awful. Michelle and P promptly discarded the recipe and let their well-developed culinary instincts take over. Each of the six essential oils, which Michelle had obtained by mail-order, came under the intense scrutiny of two sensitive noses before being added to the second batch, with proportions adjusted up or down by consensus. The result was infinitely better than the first batch, but still bore little resemblance to the commercial absinthe we'd enjoyed in Okinawa. Batch three was better still, but by that point our taste buds were too exhausted to tell. We blended the three to afford an acceptable compromise, then bottled the lot and hauled it out to Burning Man, where it made for an exciting and lively evening at Miss P's desert cafe. To my knowledge, not a drop survived the trip, and no potted plants were reported injured or killed.

After our return from the playa, the research continued. We learned from our friend Miss V, a landscape designer

and expert on exotic plants, that while the drink may be illegal in this country, its principal ingredient, the wormwood plant, is widely available as an ornamental. It's a low-growing, grey-green shrub with lacy leaves, known to the botanists as *artemesia absinthum*. Before long, it was thriving in our suburban backyard, and Michelle was experimenting with an extract version of absinthe.

Making absinthe from the plant itself, rather than from processed oils, has two major advantages. First, adding oils to grain alcohol is the brewer's equivalent of making kool-aid: a shortcut approach that's never going to yield anything particularly interesting or complex. Second, wormwood oil cannot be legally sold if it contains more than trace amounts of thujone, its active ingredient. Unless you're working with the plant, you're only making flavored Everclear, not real absinthe.

Soaking crushed leaves in alcohol, on the other hand, yields a potent extract with all the active ingredients a refined absinthe fiend might hope to ingest. Michelle developed a new recipe, based around this extract and flavored with brandy and essential oils. Miss P, working independently, came up with another approach: take a bottle of Pernod, which is essentially absinthe without the thujone, and mix it up with wormwood extract. Both versions were well-received at the last Proust Wake.

To drink absinthe in the European manner requires a little patience and the correct equipment. A measure of the liquor is poured into a stemmed glass, over which is placed a small, slotted spoon developed specifically for this purpose (though a fork will do the job if you aren't lucky enough to own an absinthe spoon). Place a sugar cube on the spoon and apply a slow trickle of ice-cold water. With a little practice, you can get the sugar to dissolve without clouding or "bruising" the absinthe, yielding a beautiful green cocktail that will rip the top of your head off. Prousit!



**The Marcel Proust Support Group**

P Segal  
August 1994

I live in a grand, crumbling Edwardian in the geographical center of San Francisco, in a two-story, 14-room flat with six friends and an endless succession of delightful house guests. The inmates are, without exception, arty in one way or another; we have lived together and creatively fermented side by side for years. We are family, dysfunctional but nonetheless mutually supportive.

As the birthday of one roommate rolled around, I asked him what he would like for a present. He thought about it for a few days, and then he said, "What I would really like for my birthday is for you to read Proust with me. I've tried to get through *Remembrance of Things Past* three times now, and I just don't think I can do it without a support group."

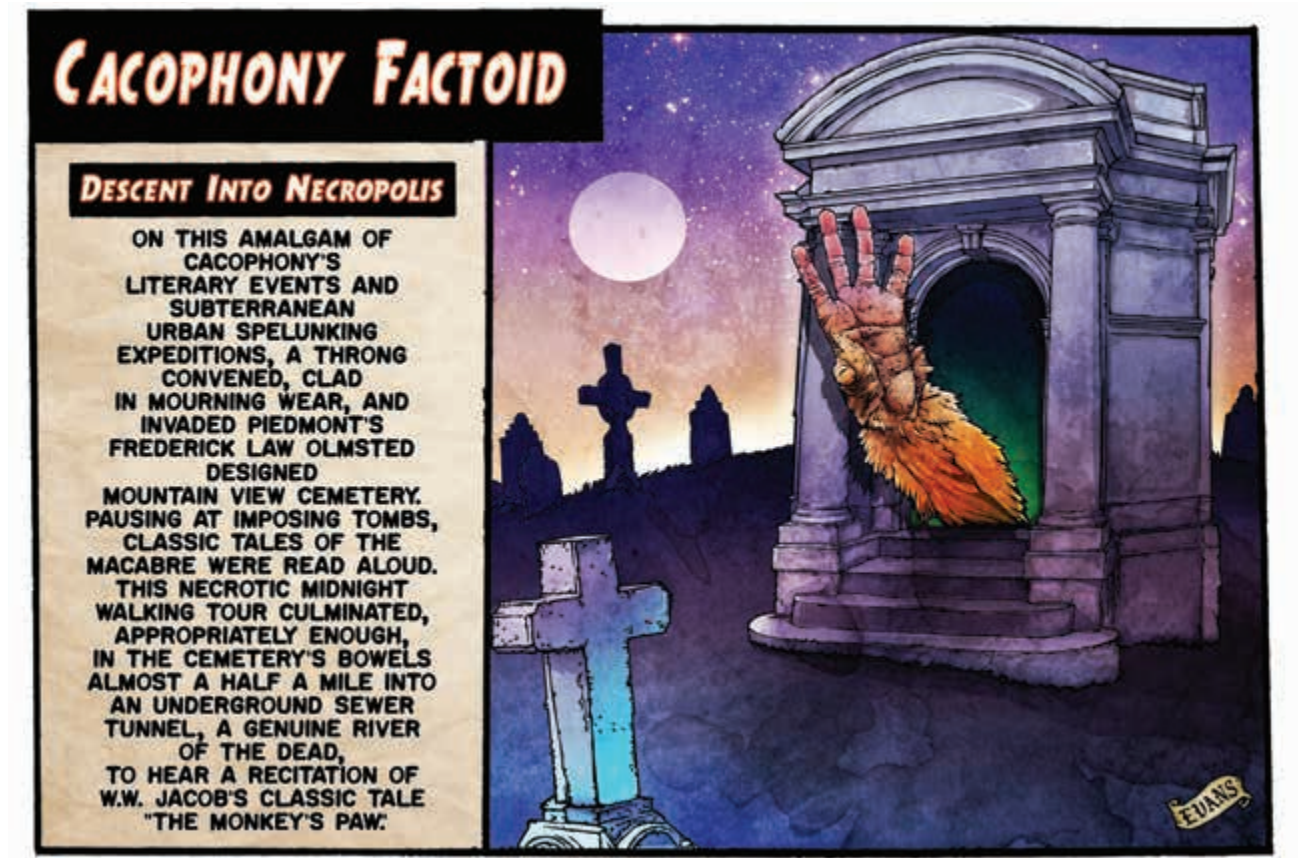
I myself had tried to read Proust twice that many times. "Okay," I answered feebly, "anything for you."

"Don't look so miserable," he said, "We only have to read ten pages a day. It would only take about eleven months, and maybe we could get some other people to do it with us. It'll be fun."

I asked myself where we could find a bunch of people who would subject themselves to eleven months of

purple prose, and then the obvious response suggested itself: The San Francisco Cacophony Society. Cacophony is a group that devotes itself entirely to the creation of outrageous entertainments of all sorts; some have an element of danger, others whimsy, many have a literary bent, and all of them require participation. So I sent the following notice to the Cacophony newsletter:

*"We have tried on innumerable occasions to read through to the very last pages of Marcel Proust's magnum opus, Remembrance of Things Past, some among us reaching well into the third volume of this prodigious work of literature, but succumbed to that inevitable, narcoleptic, helpless block which prevents the much-valued completion of this classic of introspective cultural history, and so we have profoundly wished to share this epic endeavor with others of like debility, gathering together in a solemn pledge, not untouched with a tinge of good-humored irony, to plough together through these three volumes at the sensible pace of ten pages a day, agreeing in advance to use the Vintage Books, 1982 edition, so we might proceed at an identical pace, and therefore, at our bimonthly meetings, be able to share the delights of the literary bliss within at an equal rate of discovery... blah blah blah."*



Facing page: Cacophony's literary "Ratpack" during yet another night of hard drinking and harder reading. Left to right: Paul "Doc" Anderson, Eric "Geekboy" Salmonson, Stuart Mangrum, and Doug "Brody Culpepper" Long, looking for trouble, or a singular turn of a phrase.

Eight hardy literature buffs showed for the first meeting, scheduled for my roommate's birthday. We drank Pernod and ate madeleines, got acquainted with the previously unknown persons, and spoke of our anxieties about this shared venture. Curious spectators came by to examine the specimens who were voluntarily committing to a 3500-plus-page read and to help dispose of the refreshments. One of them became the designated outside observer, charged with noting the behavioral changes of the support group members over the long haul.

The read began on the very next day. Four of the committed ones were members of our household, and before long, as we staggered out for morning (this term must not be taken literally) coffee, we were bearing our *Remembrances* so we might regale each other with favorite quotes. Then that wasn't enough, and we began inscribing the most deathless lines on an obscure wall over the cat food. When the going got rough, like the fortnight when a particular dinner party had been going on for 140 pages, we had each other, as we had often been, co-conspirators forced to attend a dull party.

Then we found ourselves speculating. "What is Legrandin's trip, anyway?" or "was Odette really in bed with de Forcheville when Swann came over?" We were very hooked.

In our zeal, we announced our second meeting in the Cacophony newsletter. This time, 40 people showed up, but we figured that was because we had included, in our long-winded announcement, the news that we would be showing a movie as part of the evening's entertainment, *Swann in Love*, which is one of the sections of *Remembrance*, and a short subject, Monty Python's hilarious skit, "The Marcel Proust Summarization Contest." The crowd included numerous persons who were trying to read Proust, thinking about trying, had been forced to read Proust, or had read it in French. People read aloud (in English and French), munched a lot of madeleines, and drank a copious quantity of Pernod.

Our outside observer, and anyone else who knows me, soon realized that of all of us, I had been the most altered. The existence of this publication is testimony enough, but in the earlier stages, the warning signs were clearly visible. I had dumped the generic answering machine message and replaced it with a weekly Proust quote, a tradition I have maintained without deviation for about three years, and without having to repeat myself once. In the beginning of this manifestation, I got a lot of hang-up calls, probably clients who were sure I'd finally gone round the bend. Other people began calling on a very regular basis, just to hear the quote.

My callers, too, found themselves altered. Serendipitous quotes rang too many bells in their ears; their resolve not to read Proust melted away. Even the people who had been laughing at my obsession were secretly buying Volume I and indulging.

The months sped by. We were leading double lives, ours and Marcel's ("Are you still having dinner with the Swanns?" "Have you left for Balbec yet?") Our capacity to speak in simple sentences diminished. Some readers, unable to bear it any longer, dropped out, while others joined in.

We held our meetings in fin-de-siècle venues and amassed a library of Proustiana. Nine months after we had begun, an impending sense of loss began setting in. Only eight hundred pages left... five hundred pages left... two hundred... oh, no. We had long since stopped greeting each other with inquiries as to states of well-being. The first question we asked upon encountering another of our kind was invariably "what page are you on?"

It was a blustery, rainy January when the end was near for the three survivors of the original group, all of whom lived in our household. A certain rivalry ensued as to which of the three of us would finish first. John, who started the whole thing, announced that he was sure he would finish first. We soon discovered why; he had found our copies and torn out the last page.

John was, of course, correct about being the first of us to finish. He was also right about the fact that reading Proust had been fun, as shared horrors always seem in retrospect. But that wasn't the only reason.

For me, one of the great thrills of the read was the effect it had on my attitude towards books in general. They had always been some kind of sacred cows, not to be marked or mutilated in any way, but treated with utmost respect. But as I read, it became painfully clear that discrete microdots of fine leaded pencil would not suffice to flag the gems I came across on every page. As I made my way through the first few hundred pages, I got over my bourgeoisie reservations about the printed page, and the margins became flooded with squiggles and exclamation marks, the text itself riddled with underling, highlighting, brackets and colored paper markers.

My middle-class veneration of books toppled even further as the months wore on and I, worn out, would fall asleep frequently with the book in my hands, unable to put it down, only to be startled back into consciousness as it fell, with a resounding thunk, on the bedside floor. Within a short time, the binding was so distressed that Volume I broke into multiple sections. When some of my

coreaders were off on vacation, I was able to lend them chunks of text to take along, sparing them the weight of an entire volume. In these two notable deviations from my former behavior, marking and breaking great books, I felt the lightness of heart that comes with the shedding of restrictive conventions.

There was fun to be had, and another great breakthrough, in absorbing the cynical and all-too-true observations Proust made on the subject of human nature, particularly in the realm of love. It lent a sense of foreboding to every interpersonal encounter, the anticipatory irrepressible laughter I felt as a child when I knew that the jig was up and I was about to be busted. With the belief that I now possess some kind of code to the human heart, I can face all possibilities without fear, and with laughter.



### Requiem for a Sunrise (August 6th, 8:15 am, 1945)

When: August 10th, 8:15 am

Where: At that strange tile thing in the shadow of the Jeremiah O'Brien, Fort Mason

"War was return of earth to ugly earth,  
War was foundering of sublimities,  
Extinction of each happy art and faith,  
By which the world had still kept head in the air.  
Protesting logic or protesting love,  
Until the unendurable moment struck—  
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns—  
Nibbling the walls of factory and church  
Like a child, piecrust: felling groves of trees  
Like a child, Dandelions with a switch.  
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill  
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:  
A sight to be recalled in elder days  
When leamedly the future we devote  
To yet more boastful visions of despair."  
Bring: Thematic poetry to read, breakfast goodies to eat and drink.

Your host: Geli Tripping

— Rough Draft, August 1991

### Poetry Breakfast

Saturday, 20 August, 8:30 am, Mt. Olympus

A breakfast with the Gods. We will meet at the NE corner of 17th and Clayton Streets and hike up the steps to Mt. Olympus where we will read from Ovid, Homer, and even Yeats—whatever puts you in the other world.  
Bring breakfast goodies to share.  
Your host: Cat J.

— Rough Draft, August 1988

### The 1997 Marcel Proust Memorial Wake

P Segal · reprinted from *Proust Said That*, 1997

As the years grow abundantly fuller, there is less and less time to orchestrate the grand Proust Wake, the Marcel Proust Support Group's only regular function of the year. This year's events crowded the schedule complicated by beloved visitors, other massive social events and the birthday I had hoped to obfuscate by sharing it so lovingly with the demise of Marcel P.

Curiously, the birthday has become more observed than ever. There were more celebratory lunches, dinners, cocktails, and presents than usual this year, and lots more planned for the coming weeks. Today I went to my PST mailbox for the first time in days and found two birthday cards, one with no signature below the hand-written greetings and no return address. The other contained a lovely handkerchief, a gift from a sweet reader I have never met.

Planning the Proust Wake each year diverts my attention from the fact that I am about to be another year older, requiring that every available minute be consumed with planning and preparation.

This year there was no time whatsoever to make printed invitations; the word was spread on the phone, at other social events, or over e-mail.

Little coaxing was required to summon guests to the wake, as it was once again scheduled at the John Wickett's Museum of Exotica, one of San Francisco's most curious secret venues. The Wickett Museum is not open to the public, so invitations are valued, rare chances to spend an evening in this atmosphere of opulent oddity, redolent of many bygone eras, and full of the best memorabilia from the city's long-lost Playland at the Beach.

As the date of the event approached, this year the 22nd of November, there were even fewer funds or hours available than usual; this required some cleverness regarding the catering menu, and a lot of help from supportive participants, who'd bring enough wine to make up for the small batch of absinthe I could concoct. It was out of the question this year to provide the more lavish elements of Proustian fare; I wracked my memory for occasions in *Remembrance* when the food was utterly simple. Finally I recalled the picnic in *Within a Budding Grove*, where the band of girls ate sandwiches, an innovation in French fare which our Marcel found so difficult to consume because the concept was so foreign, and left him settling for the little cakes alone, which, along with the apricot tarts, made dessert. There would be madeleines, of course, and the three pounds of cream cheese left over from a catering job mixed with strawberries, and whole wheat wafers.

Two members of the original MPSG, Miss Dawn and Miss Harley, came to spend the day with me in the kitchen, getting the last of the evening's catering prepared. In the redwood back parlor next to the kitchen, Miss Lisa, who had come all the way from the far northwest to help with the preparations, hand-lettered the cards that would identify the dishes, while my roommate Jason drew Proust on each of them.

What I really wanted this year was to have Proust appear as he did the first year at the museum. Last year, the inimitable Stuart Mangrum, who contributed the absinthe story to this issue, and was largely responsible for this magazine ever coming together, refused to impersonate my literary idol because he'd spent too much of the last wake stuck in an aerie with a cardboard tube and a crotchety old ridgeback, waiting for the moment when the séance would begin. "Look," he'd said, "If you come up with a coffin, I'd lie in state for you, so at least I could hear what's going on." Of course I hadn't turned up a casket, so Stuart was free to simply be a guest.

My friend Jerry James, the person who got me involved with the Burning Man experience, recently devised an elegant and sturdy coffin as an art project. So I called Stuart and reminded him of his terms for the previous year, and said I'd found the missing element. "Okay," he said, a bit disgruntled, "I guess I'll do it."

Stuart is as charming a guest as you could want to have, and so I couldn't imagine leaving him speechless in a box for the entire evening. What a waste of such a clever conversationalist. Within the usual seventy-two hours before the big night, I came up with a plan. Stuart/Proust could lollygag in the rear of the museum for the first forty-five minutes of so, while the coffin sat closed on sawhorses in the main room of the museum. The dried flower wreath that's been hanging on the Proust quote wall at MPSGHQ was draped over the grill on the coffin to obscure notice that it was empty. My housemates Gavin and Jane were able to put together a tape of sound effects, beginning with huge cracks of thunder, followed by the sound of pouring rain, and ending with more extremely loud thunder. At the first thunder, the lights in the museum would go out, and Proust would slip through the confused crowd and jump into the big box. The lights would go on, and there would be the body lying in state with the lid open, so he wouldn't have to deal with the all too uncomfortable sensation of being buried alive. And then when the thunder sounded again half an hour later, and the lights went out, Proust could rise to a sitting position, and give the guests the thrill of seeing him returned to life. That was the plan.

At first we toyed with the idea of carrying the coffin in with Stuart inside, but he admitted that he would have to be considerably sedated to endure such an entry. This second possibility seemed less annoying, and saved me from having to find sufficient pallbearers. The newest addition to MPSGHQ, Jason Johnston, agreed to cope with the cues for the tape, and Nicholas Lynch, one of the earliest members of the household, who came down from Seattle to help, would deal with the lights.

Of course this bit of theater didn't quite happen as early as planned and Stuart was relegated to the smoking

section of the museum, the back stairs, for quite a while, along with half the guests and their cigarettes. He introduced himself to all and sundry out back as Marc Prowst and waited patiently for his cue. Finally the thunder sounded and the lights went out, and Stuart moved quickly through the crowd and jumped into the casket. Against either of our wishes, someone slammed the lid down. As soon as the lights went back up, and I noticed this, I went over and raised it, leaning over the inert body to whisper an apology.

Members of the MPSG approached the casket, moaning and declaring their unhappiness at the passing of the beloved Marcel. I laid a bouquet of flowers on his body, hoping none of them were rich in allergens that would make him sneeze back to life before the last cue. Cacophony Society ringleader Michael Michael asked if anyone would like to speak, and suggested that I should be the first.

I hadn't planned on this, so I had to wing it. Of course, I can't remember much of what I did say, but I do remember this: "I only regret that Proust died before I ever had a chance to get to know him. I have a feeling that if he were still alive, I would know him..." I looked around at the splendid guests in their glorious costumes, tuxedos and evening gowns, "because I have the great good fortune to meet all the most interesting people in the world."

When the speeches had ended, I approached the casket and leaned over, my thick dark hair falling forward to obscure vision of Stuart's face. "How are you doing?" I whispered. "I'm thirsty!" he said. I brought my glass into firing range of his lips. "Have some of this," I whispered, and poured a small drizzle of absinthe into his mouth. Stuart smiled as I carefully poured, avoiding much dribbling on his elegant tux or white makeup; in retrospect, I'm so glad he didn't choke on it.

The second thunder cue got bungled because Jason, Nicholas and I were all otherwise occupied when it went off. Tired of being dead, Proust finally sat up on his own. Of course the estimable Proust lovers made the most of Stuart's cueless return to life, exclaiming excitedly, cheering and clapping as the former corpse handed out flowers from his bouquet to his adorers. Sister Dana of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence spontaneously began a chorus of "You Light Up My Life", with a few others joining him in song. Now I was free to just enjoy the party.

My friend Nelson Johnson spent a large portion of the evening playing French cabaret songs of the '20s on his accordion. I'd brought CD's of Debussy and a few other appropriate composers, but never got around to playing them. In this band of the highly social, the sound of conversation is music enough.




Above: John Casten and Nik Phelps play duets at the first Marcel Proust Memorial Wake.



## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**NIGHT OF THE EXQUISITE CORPSE**

THIS CABARET OF CONFUSION AND DADA EXPERIMENTATION WAS ADAPTED BY ANDRE BRETON AND YVES TANGUY FROM PARLOR AMUSEMENTS POPULAR IN EUROPE AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH CENTURY. REIMAGINED AS A VAUDEVILLIAN PRODUCTION IN THE LATE 1980s BY CACOPHONY, THE AUDIENCE WROTE THE PLAY, TAKING TURNS ADDING TEXTUAL ELEMENTS UPON VIEWING THE PREVIOUS CONTRIBUTOR'S LAST TWO SCRIPT LINES. THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS CONJURED AN UNCANNY INTERACTIVE DRAMATURGY UNFOLDING IMMEDIATELY ON STAGE AS ACTORS READ FROM AUDIENCE-WRITTEN SCRIPTS INCORPORATING PROPS INITIALLY DISPLAYED ABOVE THE BANK OF TYPEWRITERS USED TO CREATE THE PLAY.



One hour is allotted for the audience to create the scripts

**PART I**  
"Are You Out Of Your Mind?"  
(An admitting room in a psychiatric hospital)

**PART II**  
"The Gods Be Kickin' Ass"  
An Odyssey in Three Acts

**CREDITS**

Producers  
Louise Jarmilowicz  
Michael Michael  
Jayson Wechter

**THE CAST**  
"Meet the Press"  
Mr. President - Bob Gridley  
Dan Quayle - Phil Bewley  
"The Devil Made Me Do It"  
Faith Hope - Diana Brown  
Lucifer - Lex Lonehood  
Mr. Sandman - Barry Weir  
Balladeer

24 AUGUST 3, 1988 THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN

**CAST**

The Interrogator  
Joe Anyone, Thomas Burchfield  
Suspect/Narrator, Tom Meshishnek  
Dr. Fate, Loren McGregor  
Oratia Silk, Louise Jarmilowicz  
Reader/Stand-in, Joan Cullinane

SF. \$3. 965-4773. (Also Sun/1.)  
★ 'Night of the Exquisite Corpse'  
The SF Cacophony Society presents its annual "Night of the Exquisite Corpse," based on a parlor game invented by French surrealists Andre Breton and Yves Tanguy. The audience takes turns writing the script for several short pieces, while only allowed to see the tail end of the previous person's contribution. Moments later the works are presented on stage by a crack surrealist acting troupe, 8 pm, Haight Ashbury Community Cultural Center, 1833 Page, SF. Free.

Music is provided by the Tr...  
under the direction

**Dr. Fate's Lament**



SPECIAL THANKS to Ralph Maltese, for making it all possible.

FAMILY CAT PRODUCTIONS has been presenting surrealist, avant-garde, and psychedelic theater since 1965. They are always interested in making contact with creative, talented, energetic, and/or simply crazed individuals for future productions.

THE SAN FRANCISCO CACOPHONY SOCIETY is an anarchistic confederation of urban adventurers, poets, mystics, beatniks, players of bizarre games, and assorted undefinable free spirits loosely organized to stage and take part in offbeat experiences outside those available from commercial entertainment and "normal" society.

The San Francisco Cacophony Society offers an opportunity for artists, urban adventurers, game players, playful adults and wily children to share ideas and the urban environment in new and unusual ways. It has no leadership and little structure. Events are listed monthly in a newsletter called "Rough Draft," and are open to everyone. Anyone may submit an event by sending a writeup to PO Box 6392, SF 94101.  
To receive "Rough Draft," send \$5 cash for a check payable to cash to the above address.  
for more information, call 564-5047

really not that much different from us.

"The Gods Be Kickin' Ass" — This will be a three-act play collaboratively created by the audience using the classic Exquisite Corpse technique. You are requested to write stage directions and dialogue for three characters (see below). Props are displayed for inclusion in the script; please instruct the characters to make use of them in the stage directions. We have set up several typewriters for each act where you may contribute as often as you wish — from a



Presented by Family Cat and  
The San Francisco Cacophony Society

**Cast of Characters for**  
MR WIT. Armed with his acid v...  
the life of the party on his good...  
his character...

(The 3rd Annual)  
**The Night of the Exquisite Corpse**  
An evening of surrealist theater written by the audience.

When: Saturday, July 15, 8:00 pm  
Where: The Noe Valley Ministry, Sanchez (at 24th)

"Exquisite Corpse: Game of folded paper played by several people, who compose a sentence or drawing without anyone seeing proceeding collaborations. The now classic example, which gave the game its name was drawn from the first sentence obtained this way: the exquisite corpse will drink new wine."

—Andre Breton, "Le Cadavre Exquis"

From parlor game to an evening of surrealist theater! Before the performance, anyone may contribute lines of text for the script, none having any idea what has proceeded, other than a line or two by the previous writer. (Demonstrable writing skill is not required.) The result will be a non-linear, absurd and chaotically hilarious script performed by a surrealist acting troupe. Other unlikely events will occur.

Cost for the event is \$3.00. Tickets are available in advance at the Giant Camera behind the Cliff House (where Geary Blvd. meets the Pacific Ocean, SF) or the night of the event.

— Rough Draft, July 1989

Facing page: Various materials from the Night of the Exquisite Corpse events.

Below: Lex, Bob "Zeus" Gridley and a nymph acting out contents of the play generated by the audience as they pecked away at a bank of typewriters during the Night of the Exquisite Corpse.

**Dead Man's Party**  
Stuart Mangrum, *Twisted Times*, Spring 1994

Like so many bad ideas that have had their way with me over the years, it seemed like the thing to do at the time: go to a dive bar in the Tenderloin and hold a wake for Charles Bukowski, the celebrated dead poet best known for writing *Barfly*. The event notice in *Rough Draft*, the SF Cacophony Society newsletter, read like this:

Charles Bukowski Support Group

Big Hank is dead. He was the only author who could successfully convey the Olympian grandeur, the pure hedonistic rapture, and truly spiritual reward one can achieve by purging one's bladder in a cascading torrent, held back during hours of chatting up a woman of debatable, if not entirely sordid character. He put life and its pleasures into a literary context you could really get your meat into, so to speak. We'll gather and hoist a few to this modern day Proust of the gin joint at one of the Tenderloin's finest establishments. There will be a Bukowski look-alike contest (not for the weak of stomach). We encourage readings of two pages or less from the master's oeuvre. Passages dealing with death or the tentative nature of existence are preferred. We will also have an original prose/poetry competition. Entries of more than one page will be ridiculed, their perpetrators cat-called into submission and silence. If anyone should win the look-alike contest and the original work contest, they'll win a night at the Hotel Essex in the Tenderloin.

When: Friday, April 15, 8 pm until closing



Where: HaRa Bar, 875 Geary at Larkin

Bring: 1) \$ for booze, or someone to borrow from, 2) \$2 event fee (to pay for the organizer's drinks), 3) ID, 4) shirt, shoes, pants.

Your host: Sebastian Melmoth

The old lady didn't want me to go but what the fuck. I put on my worst sport coat, bounced a check, Xeroxed a couple of pages from *You Get So Alone* and jumped in the car, hoping none of my tickets had gone to warrant.

Melmoth, the event organizer, lives on the same side of the Bay as me, so I stopped at his house on the way and discovered he was ahead of me by nine or ten Heilman's. He opened two more cans, belched, and wiped his fingers on a brutal Hawaiian shirt before shaking my hand. I spotted a .32 and a copy of Bukowski's *Post Office* on the carpet next to the recliner. "Here," he said, handing me both beers. "You're way behind. I'm out of gin but I think I've got some kind of weird cactus juice shit." I followed him into the kitchen, where his housemate and her friend were cooking some beans, and watched him root around in the cupboards. "Here we go!" he hooted. It was that shit they put in fake margaritas at cheap Mexican restaurants. It tasted like barf with a twist. It got the job done.

By the time we got to BART, we were already late, but what the fuck. This wasn't the sort of event you wanted to be on time for, even if you were organizing it. Or especially if you were organizing it. We'd gained another East Bay derelict by this point, Dr. Winky, and the three of us rode the train down to Powell Street, where we bought cigars and back-up bottles in a little shithole liquor store and walked the last four blocks to the Ha Ra Bar.

Ha Ra: the name says it all, don't it? A sound somewhere between honest laughter and puking your guts out. A cheer and a jeer, and hopefully not the last Ha Ra. But what the fuck? The booze wasn't watered and the john was clean. I ordered rye on the rocks and a beer back from a bartender who looked like two retired longshoremen and turned around to eye the crowd: a few off-duty drivers from the cab company next door, four or five semi-pro drunks, and a couple dozen counterculture types from

Cacophony taking pictures of each other. We put a framed photo of the dead fucker on the bar and laid a bunch of dead flowers around it. Somebody bought him a drink, fat lot of good it did him. I had three or four more rounds—who's counting—and then the readings started.

Here's the one I liked best:  
 Beasts bouncing through time—  
 Van Gogh writing his brother for paints  
 Hemingway testing his shotgun  
 Celine going broke as a doctor of medicine  
 The impossibility of being human  
 Villon expelled from Paris for being a thief  
 Faulkner drunk in the gutters of his town  
 The impossibility of being human  
 Burroughs killing his wife with a gun  
 Mailer stabbing his  
 The impossibility of being human  
 Maupassant going mad in a rowboat  
 Dostoevsky lined up against a wall and shot  
 Crane off the back of the boat into the propeller  
 The impossibility  
 Sylvia with her head in the oven like a baked potato  
 Harry Crosby leaping into that Black Sun  
 Lorca murdered on the road by Spanish troops  
 The impossibility  
 Artaud sitting on a madhouse bench  
 Catterton drinking rat poison  
 Shakespeare a plagiarist  
 Beethoven with a horn stuck into his head against deafness  
 The impossibility the impossibility  
 Nietzsche gone totally mad  
 The impossibility of being human  
 All too human  
 This breathing  
 In and out  
 Out and in  
 These punks  
 These cowards  
 These champions  
 These mad dogs of glory  
 Moving this little bit of light toward  
 Us  
 Impossibly.

Okay, so I like it, but what the fuck. If you don't, tough shit. It's just a poem by a dead guy.

Before I knew it they were closing the dump. Somebody gave me a ride back across the bridge—I'm a little hazy on that part—and then I remember opening the bar at Spenger's Fish Grotto in Berkeley at 6 a.m. and drinking on the plastic until about noon, when the place got flooded with white-haired boat trash. There was something about some burning magnesium too — big sheets of the stuff.

I took a combat nap and made it home around five, roughly 24 hours from when I'd left. It wasn't an epic drunk, not quite a lost weekend, but try telling that the the old lady. Shit, I'm still paying.

But at least I'm alive, unlike that fucker Bukowski. He's worm food now.

Fuck. The impossibility.



**Bukowski Day at the Races**

Denzil Meyers

One blustery Saturday afternoon, walking around 14th and Mission looking for the Branden Lai martial arts store, a copy of the *Rough Draft* newsletter became stuck to my shoe. That month's events included an invitation to join whomever at a "Charles Bukowski Day at the Races" — Meet at a dive bar 7th & Mission, take Caltrans to Bay Meadows Race Track, read Bukowski aloud in the grandstand between runs of the horses. There was an exhortation to bring ID, and to stay away if there was a warrant out for your arrest.

I was new to town, just 4 months from Brooklyn and the East Village, and completely open to whatever San Francisco had to offer. When I arrived at the bar, it was difficult to tell who was a regular, who a collaborator. Ridiculous outfits, sloppy behavior, and improbable monikers mingled with cheap alcohol and cheaper cigars.

I met Michael Lyons, John Law, Chris Radcliffe, and a few others. A guy entered through a fog of cigarette smoke, badly pigeon toed, wearing a Bart Simpson t-shirt with vomit on it. I couldn't tell where the subterfuge ended and the real sadness began. That was Larry Harvey. It seemed there was a fine line between a handicapper and the handicapped.

While the group was rowdy at the bar and fully raucous on Caltrans, we seemed to blend right in at the track. We took turns shouting out Bukowski stories and poems, standing on the arms of our plastic seats, cheering and booing and offending with aplomb, until the damp and cold rolled in, and I decided to split it back to town.

An hour or so later, I heard that John and Chris (completely out of their minds) created quite a scene on the northbound Caltrans. Reportedly, they were swinging from the luggage racks, terrorizing patrons to the point where the conductor stopped the train between stations so the police could board. Of course, that was the boys' cue to kick out the emergency windows, run under the train, jump the fence, and live yet another day one-half step ahead of the law.

Over the next few years, I would learn that that was what this group did best — skirt the law, play on the boundaries, manage somehow to pull off the next hilarious prank or wild event, always ready to dash for the bushes.



**BUKOWSKI AT THE RACES**  
 When: Saturday, January 11th, 12:00 Noon.  
 Where: 7-11 Club, 711 Market Street (or meet at 1:55 PM at Cal Train Station, 3rd St. at Townsend. Buy a ticket for San Mateo-Bay Meadows Race Track, \$3.50 round trip. Train leaves at 2 pm.)  
 We'll drink at the 7-11, stumble down to the train, drink, take the train to Bay Meadows, drink, read, drink, play the horses, drink, take the train back to Frisco, drink. Bring: 1) \$\$ for drinks, betting, bail, whatever (if you're thrifty, \$10 should be enough); 2) Booze (cheaper than buying it at the track. Must be well-concealed on person.); 3) Cigars (cheap); 4) Bukowski prose/poetry (preferably race track stories).  
 S. Melmoth 415/566



Above: 3rd Annual *Night of the Exquisite Corpse* Producers Ethyl Ketone, Russ Conrad, Louise Jarmilowicz, with cast member Amelia Hancock, after the play at The Noe Valley Ministry, 1989.



**A Night in the Life**

D. S. Black

*Wenn San Franzisko brennt,  
was ihr dran Gutes nennt,  
sehst, das geht am End'  
in einen Sack.*

[If San Francisco burns  
whatever you consider good in it,  
behold, that too goes finally  
down the same drain.]

—Brecht-Weill, *Mahagonny*

Mahagonny was a city of nets; The City (as we call it here, rather than Frisco), this city is a high wire act, with high tension hills and hollows, a graceful daub of fog to soften the pastels to gray and mop the feverish brow of flashbacking insomniacs trying to escape “the cyst of the eternal present.”

The call of the street has drawn me on many walks through the Mission District.

On my first visit, in '79, I stayed on 20th St. near Folsom. When I later moved to the city, in '83, my first several months were on 14th St., just up from the enormous and forbidding YMCA, which even then was a boarded-

up, condemned citadel, awaiting its own Quasimodo.

For the last decade I've spec'd the area up and down. Early on, a camera was part of my équipement.

The Gartland Pit was always a grim magnet. A blasted hole at the corner of 16th and Valencia. A wounded, fenced-up gateway to the North Mission. A depression, a cavity of despair.

The street eddied off through the frayed net, the pitiful fence thrown up to shroud the secrets that rose out of the ruin. A soil and gravel ramp (cut with the ashes of the dead) trudged down into basement debris of what was once the low-income Gartland Apartments complex.

It was a part of “the Zone”—a place which exists on the margins of perception. A ghost town, a run in reality, the Twilight Zone—it goes by many names. From the Zone of Tarkovsky's movie *Stalker* to the devastated northern part of Germany, from Peenemünde on down, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Zone has become a modern day cipher for the terra incognita, which on this Landsatted planet has moved from view. The Zone, where we each must face It. Alone.

Except this night that we were together. There was a time given, a place, a request for help. We burn the message, fallen on us from higher than Earth's atmosphere, salvaged from Earth's prime meridian, keep the picture, hmm, and wash our hands. There is more to this than we can see. We have no recourse, no appeal: we have to go out there and bring the operative in again. The message is tantamount to an order from the highest levels.

And so, on this Pynchonesque bidding, we ventured into the Zone. It came to mind, Toto, that we were not in San Francisco any more.

*Because I could not stop for Death  
He kindly stopped for me*

Gartland was torched in 1975, in what is generally thought to be another callous instance of landlord arson.

“Nuke your landlord” and other similar sentiments are sprayed on many walls of the city, especially lower Haight. In the Mission, the resentment of the community was still palpable at the cynical destruction of Gartland nearly ten years later. The 12 to 30 people who were caught in the blaze were memorialized in graffiti: *ARSON FOR PROFIT!* and *WE BOUGHT IT AT THE GARTLAND APTS LANDLORD ARSON 12/7/75.*

*Viva Eleanora!* The words soared on the back wall above the devastation. A smoking revolver was later added to further punctuate the message. Off to one side, there

was this poignant counterpoint, inscribed on a splintered plank: *I DID NOT ASK TO BE BORN*, a sad reworking of the Sophocles line: *Not to be born is best.*

Tombstones and cairns soon nosed out of the rubble. A theater group called *ContraBand* set up a stage with stones and held performances there in the fall of 1987.

There were other impromptu memorials, even *objets d'art*—I saw a doll that had been inserted in the rusty end of a steel pipe that drained rainwater. It was a macabre sculpture, the golden haired doll serving out its days upside down, up to its neck in a pipe beneath the street.

High above loomed a billboard, with the taunting offer of home-loans: *We got the money!*

Augusto Sandino appeared on a wall near the bottom of the Pit, his mouth an “o” of derision. By his feet lay an empty paint can, and the skeleton of a chair. Someone had whitewashed his speech balloon, so he stood there with his hand to hip, silently hectoring.

On the opposite wall, the cement face of *Antisocial Ariel* smiled enigmatically by an electricity meter.

Although the Pit was plumbed from a conflagration of homes, it still served as makeshift housing for the city's dispossessed, the homeless. They slept on the concrete foundation laid bare under the canopy of the street.

Vivid messages were always to be found on the walls,



## CACOPHONY FACTOID

### CYBERTHON

IN LATE 1990, THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY WAS ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST VIRTUAL REALITY CONVENTION. HOSTED BY VPL RESEARCH, STEWART BRAND, TIMOTHY LEARY AND OTHER COUNTER CULTURE LUMINARIES, THE EVENT WAS HELD AT COLOSSAL PICTURES AND RAN FOR 24 HOURS STRAIGHT. JARON LANIER AND AUTODESK CREATED AN INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE INITIALLY TESTED BY TECH JUNKIE ROBIN WILLIAMS. FEATURING A PERFORMANCE OF EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC BY ARTIST MAURO EFEF AND HELD UNDER A MAZE OF CONCRETE OVERPASSES, THE EXPRESSLY NON-VIRTUAL CACOPHONY OFFERING WAS ACCESSED VIA CANOE. PARTICIPANTS, PERHAPS EXPECTING VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES, WERE CONFUSED AND SCANDALIZED.

Facing page: Midnight literary walks were a popular type of event organized by many different people over the years. It was not uncommon for 30 to 50 people to convene in some remote corner of the city at midnight to begin a walk of several miles, punctuated by readings from authors famous and obscure. This walk set out from the ghostly and historic *Portals to the Past* in Golden Gate Park two hours after the beginning of park curfew.

the testimony of uncertain survivors, wondering as a last resort whether to *LEAVE TOWN?* and musing that *MUSEUMS REPRESENT THE MUMMY OF A CULTURE THAT HAS LONG SINCE BEEN DEAD!*—a thought balloon of the East Bay graffiti artist Apollinaire.

As we stepped through the fence and descended into the Pit, Jim Kennedy said, “Maybe we should keep our voices down.”

To ease his fear, Thomas Burchfield, one of the co-leaders of this tour, made the sign of the Trinity: *In the name of the cathode, the anode, and the holy grid...*

“Call it the pits, all right,” Katje muttered, shuffling down the gravel and beer glass slope.

“An army of lovers can be beaten,” Burchfield reminded us, quoting a chalked inscription we had seen earlier, in a Chinatown alleyway.

All of the previous times I had reconnoitered the Pit, I had gone down alone. No one was there, just rodent-like traces of transients, their trash and improvised bedding. It was a dream finally leading this team down.

The Thomas Pynchon Walking Tour consisted of a dozen or more restless souls who gathered late one Friday night (under the auspices of the San Francisco Cacophony Society) for a lit’rary recreation, which arced across the throbbing, convulsed cityscape.

Katje, Thomas Burchfield, and I were the three leaders who pulled together scenes and citations from the novels *V*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and *The Crying of Lot 49*. In the latter, his shortest, most compressed novel, a twelve page passage describes the basic route of this tour.

We had departed Spec’s, a North Beach bar, about midnight. It was after three now—La Rondalla had closed, kicking us out into the grime of the bluelit street. We had no choice but to face the remaining night fog-on. We were each a sort of modern-day, newstyle Basho the Poet-Wanderer—by doing this mad epic, we had opened our hides Come What May, each baring a weather-exposed leather skeleton.

Walking up Valencia to 16th, there was some nervous chuckling as we stepped off the lamplit part of the street. The group slipped pools of nervous mercury through a tear in the fence fabric. Down the slope we trudged into the Pit.

“Aren’t we going to be seen if we go down there?” someone hesitated.

“Who will see us? Most people don’t see into the Pit, especially not at night.”

Nobody was visible in the flashlight ray I used to probe

the ledges that were shadowed from the overhead lamplight. I was relieved to see we were not crashing in on any homeless people crashed for the night in the concrete roofed gallery under the street. We had to move fast: there was a lot of ground to be covered before day could break.

We moved to the center of the Pit. Throwing caution to the wind, I declaimed, at the top of my lungs, Pynchon’s 5th Proverb for Paranoids:

*Paranoids are not paranoids because they’re paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves, fucking idiots, deliberately into paranoid situations!*

Despite our flashes, the liquid shadows were dense and near coalescent on this October night. As we stole back out of the Pit, down the alleyway into the nebulous blue lamplight, the shapes shuddered behind us, strummed timbles on our high-strung tympani. A tortured smouldering made our nerves misfire in sympathy.



**IN A PYNCHON, ADD WATER**

Friday, 1 October, 11 pm

Join Herbert Stencil, Dewey Gland, Morris Teflon, Bloody Chiclitz, Susanna Squaducci, Pig Bodine, Dudley Eigenvalue, Paola Hod, and the Whole Sick Crew, for the second annual Thomas Pynchon Walking Tour! Come with us on the trail with Benny Profane, schlemihl and human yoyo, where we will once again consider what has been

*fused into a single abstracted Street,  
which come the full moon  
he would have nightmares about.  
...[in] a ghetto for Drunken Sailors  
nobody knew what to Do With,  
sprang on your nerves with all the abruptness  
of a normal night’s sleep  
turning to nightmare.*

when

*overheard,  
turning everybody’s face green and ugly,  
shone mercury-vapor lamps,  
receding in an asymmetric V  
to the east where it’s dark  
and there are no more bars.*

A sure cure for insomnia: our restless perambulations this time will be from Pynchon’s first novel, *V*. You can look forward to your pick of

- a nose job, or other elective surgery
- sex on the operating table
- Malta
- songs and esoterica
- conversations with a rat by the name of Veronica
- nearly going West with an alligator!

We will take the usual liberties.

Meet—>McSorley’s Old Ale House, Lower East Side

When—>11 pm, Friday, 1 October

Bring—>flashlight for an underground excursion; shotgun if you have one

Above: The Trystero muted post horn. *The Crying of Lot 49* centers on the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, finding a set of stamps at an auction (Lot 49) that sends her on an all-night search through San Francisco for an underground postal system called W.A.S.T.E. Below: *Rough Draft* write up for another Pynchon walking tour to take place in New York, hosted by San Francisco Cacophonists and based on the novel *V*.

**The Thomas Pynchon Tour**

Thomas Burchfield

One literary author that could be called a Creature of Cacophony is the equally elusive and secretive Thomas Pynchon, author of *V*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Vineland*, and other famously enigmatic tomes.

Readers familiar with Pynchon’s slender 1960s mystery tale, *The Crying of Lot 49*, may remember a thread connecting that novel to San Francisco, a link as tantalizing as the sub terra postal service that lurks under its narrative (though there’s a sweeter, more evocative picture of 1940s San Francisco in his later novel *Vineland*).

Though fragile, this connection to Lot 49 failed to stop several Cacophonites, among them Carrie Galbraith and Steven Black, from putting on a trans-nocturnal Thomas Pynchon tour through the San Francisco night (like Judy and Mickey, would if they were Bohemians).

Over 20 years and much fog has billowed under the bridge since then, enough to scramble and fuse mismatched memories of that long night with several other Cacophony all-nighters, so apologies if these brief memories overlap, crash into, or kaleidoscope with yours. I seldom remember those days. To poorly parody Dickens: It was the worst of times. It was the worst of times. Nowadays, it looks a like a faraway dimension and I, a comparative stranger.

I’m not even clear where we started, though it seems to have been in North Beach near Broadway, around 10 pm. There were anywhere from 10 to 20 of us, the numbers swelling and shrinking through the night, until they finally fell as dawn rose. John Law, among the world’s pioneer urban trekkers, lit the path ahead. Lance Alexander and Russ Conrad also came along, as did Louise Jarmilowicz and Phil Bewley.

My strongest memories were of reciting the tumultuous opening two pages of *Gravity’s Rainbow* from the chilly top of Strawberry Hill in Golden Gate Park sometime past midnight. I recall Carrie’s open-mouthed stare, over a candle, as I really did this from memory. I had to have been mad.

Later on, I recited a character’s aching soliloquy to fading love (“You go from dream to dream inside me...”) at a gas station. I also put on a paper-thin puppet show using 10-cent napkins from behind a bush somewhere, singing one of Pynchon’s parody tunes. (“Ja! Ja! Ja! In Prussia they never eat pussy!”)

At least four of us remained to toast the end, under a foggy dawn sky somewhere South of Market, Carrie, Steven, John and I. My nerves were sweetly greased with exhaustion and my remaining brain cells glowed with

exhilaration at this little triumph. The honeyed taste of those moments lingers more than any others from that long night.



**Surrealism and Dada: Oratorical Flourishes of Absurd Obscure Literatures**

When: May 5th, 7:33 pm

Where: Judah at Irving St.

*“Sometimes when reason abandons me I almost appreciate the farcical but wearisome comedy... and so hideous Eternal GOD with your serpents snout, not content with having placed my soul between the fringes of madness and of frenzied imaginings that kill slowly...”*

—Comte de Lautremont, MALDOROR

We will read 1 - 5 minute pieces in a round-robin fashion. Bring your own surrealist/Dada literature or xeroxes will be available to read from. B.Y.O.B., B.Y.O.Absinthe, B.Y.O.Obsessive Nocturnity of Frenzied Absences.

— Rough Draft, May 1991

**Suicide Note Writing Workshop**

When: Thursday, August 27th, 8pm

Where: Lincoln Way, between 3rd & 4th Avenues

Consider the many applications of the well-written suicide note. Many a job application, love letter, or similar pathetic plea for mercy could be better served by a simple threat of self-immolation.

Then too, even if one has the good sense to avoid this arguably cowardly method of honorable reality exit, it pays to have one’s parting shot ready. Carry it at all times; in the event of intersecting with an inebriated MUNI driver, jealous rival, or falling building cornice, well, you can leave ‘em guessing, can’t you?

At this workshop we will look at a few famous examples, and polish our own epitaphal epistles.

Bring: Examples you admire from the genre, famous or obscure.

Do not bring: Sharp objects, loaded guns, and so on. Acts of self-inflicted violence will be sternly discouraged (the landlord, you know).

Your host: Phil

— Rough Draft, August, 1987

**Dorothy Parker’s Perpetual Perambulating Pedagogic Paperback Pow Wow**

When: Wednesday, February 15th, 7pm

This month we are reading “Birthday,” Dorothea Tanning’s autobiographical reminiscence about life with Max Ernst and the Dada and surrealist elite.

Your host: Harry Haller

— Rough Draft, February 1995



**Pranks**

Over a dozen elaborately coiffed, elegantly dressed French aristocrats strolled about amidst the hoodie, Birkenstock, and T-shirt garbed volunteers encamped in Civic Center Plaza, a stone's throw from the grand staircase of City Hall. The earnest and dedicated homeless advocates of Food Not Bombs were serving up cauldrons of soup and mountains of fresh baked bread to the bedraggled homeless denizens of the heartless streets and parks of SF. What better way to complement such hearty fare than with a desert of delicate French pastries, thought Pierre Le Marquis du Gateau (Peter to his landlord and mom).

Of course the *pièce de résistance* was the slight dusting of the crumbs left over from the repast and delivered on a regal silver tray to the Mayor's office across the street.

Admittedly more of a political statement than typically tolerated in Cacophony, Peter Doty's *Let Them Eat Cake* was very much in the Cacophony tradition of making antler ears at the powerful, not to mention being hugely popular with the street folk being served.

Cacophony pranks varied from the elaborate and ongoing Fantasia protests at theaters and video stores to simple handbills requesting public help in retrieving lost pythons or soliciting parents to hand over troublesome toddlers to the rigorous baby-sitting practices of "Dr. Leonard Stynch."

**Salmon School**

*When: Sunday, May 15th, 8:15am (low tide, 9:11, -0.3)  
Where: Top of Hayes Hill at Hayes and Pierce in Alamo Square*

*Once a year a raging river, the Bay-to-Breakers, flows through the city. This year, join Ranger Rockfish in stocking this stream of consciously costumed folk with a rare breed of Pacific Salmon. Our tributary will flow in at the top of Hayes Street Hill fish ladder. By instinct we will run up-stream a few blocks, or as far as we can, then return to Alamo Square to drink like fish, spawn, and give someone else a chance to get trampled in a really cool fish costume. After the event, the survivors who conquered this insane obstacle without getting caught or killed will retire to some local establishment (in costume) and pay their respects to Old Man River.*

*Bring: a couple of bucks to cover costume costs, or bring it early in the week and help us make costumes. Fish food and drink. (Costumes by Bianca Oblivion, and anyone else we can net.)*

*Your host: Ranger Rockfish*

*P.S.: This may be a fish story, but rumor has it that a hardy breed of soon-to-be-filets of sole (flatfish) will run from the mouth of the river to the source.*


*—Rough Draft, May, 1994*



**CACOPHONY FACTOID**

**SALMON RUN**

SINCE 1994, CACOPHONY HAS UNLEASHED THE ANNUAL SALMON RUN: A SYMBIOTIC AND SYMBOLIC SPAWNING DURING THE GOOFY SAN FRANCISCO 12K BAY TO BREAKERS FOOT RACE. A CADRE OF CACOPHONISTS FABRICATE AND SKIN THEMSELVES IN HUMAN-SIZED SALMON COSTUMES AND THEN "SWIM" AGAINST THE ABSURD HOURS-LONG RUNNING RIVER OF ENDURANCE RACERS. YEARS AFTER ORIGINATING THIS TRADITION, LIQUOR BEHEMOTH BACARDI PURLOINED THE ENTIRE CONCEPT FOR ITS "SWIMMING UPSTREAM" AD CAMPAIGN.



Facing page: It was never more apparent that being in Cacophony required "going against the main stream" than during the Salmon Run against the tide of the 100,000 runner-strong Bay-to-Breakers footrace that takes place every May in San Francisco.

# FREE BABYSITTING! IN MY HOME



Dr. Leonard Stynch

Let me take care of your children and teach them wholesome values, the joy of honest labor and respect for old-fashioned no-nonsense discipline.

Give them a vocational headstart with my jobskills workshop conducted in an actual meat-packing house.

Vigorous physical exercise will clear their heads of all that Nintendo crap.

My special program includes

- \* Bible memorization
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- \* personal hygiene drills
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## Cacophony at SF MOMA Dean Gustafson

We examined and critiqued the utilitarian details of SFMOMA, as if it were the actual art on display. And as a tribute to the "readymade" art pieces presented to the public in the early 20th century by Marcel Duchamp.

This was held in the old SFMOMA building on Van Ness, with its intricate humidification measuring devices (looking like a tiny seismograph!), old brass fire extinguishers, cracked plaster walls, shiny doorknobs, plush benches, stoic guards, light switches, urinals, and more.

With Cacophonists' minds ready to discover art that abounds, and express adventurous conceptual and cultural insight within this fine modern art establishment, we played the most serious game of art critique, and the pretentious hyperbole flowed forth as we reflected ideas of how the art object (a museum doorknob), with its precious patina, was constructed in such a way as to juxtapose a paradigm shift from a new and old world. This is representing a paradox, of transformed self-realization indicative of a cookie cutter individualism integrated by an isolated industrialized society, subliminally suggesting a radical sensibility within the seemingly mundane. Brilliant!

Passersby in the museum joined in briefly at times, looking at what we were critiquing, as if we were seriously seeing something on museum display that should not go unmissed... then realizing after a few minutes of our exaggerated bs that it was a utilitarian device used by the museum for utilitarian purposes. (They're looking at and critiquing a light switch?) The passing museumgoer would then move along with a puzzled shrug.

Sketch books were pulled out as the critiquing went on. Challenging to the artist was capturing the intricacies of a high tech humidification device, A device that itself also draws lines, designed for measuring sensitive humidity levels in museums.

OR, a benchmark conceptual piece, symbolizing the delicate juxtaposition of a lost barbarism in art, if in fact the artist is still using hands with pencil on paper, harkening back to medieval sensibilities. This realization made obvious to the viewer indeed does render this piece a great work of art for our tenuous post-neo-avant-modern times.

We critiqued a guard, to his amusement. I posed still in an alcove, to be critiqued verbosely. Urinals were signed "R Mutt" in honor of Marcel Duchamp, who was our hero in this game.



### CACOPHONY FACTOID

**SFMOMA INFILTRATION**

ARTIST AND CACOPHONY MEMBER SVENSK RUNESTONE ESCORTED A LICENTIOUS ASSORTMENT OF HIDEBOUND, DRAMATIC AND OSTENTATIOUS ART DEVOTEES ON A BARMY FIELD TRIP OF AESTHETIC SUBVERSION TO THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART. THIS HORDE OF BIZARRE AESTHETICIANS INDULGED IN SHRILL HYPERBOLIC CRITIQUES OF THE INSTITUTION'S UTILITARIAN INSTALLATIONS. FEATURED OBJECTS DART ON THE TOUR INCLUDED DOORKNOBS, LIGHT SWITCHES, MISCELLANEOUS ELECTRICAL OUTLETS, FIRE EXTINGUISHERS, SEISMOGRAPHS, STOIC GUARDS, FILTHY BATHROOM URINALS AND OTHER EXEMPLARY SAMPLES OF OVERLOOKED READYMADE MASTERWORKS.

Facing page: Thousand of these posters advertising the helpful child training services of Dr. Stynch hit the streets in LA, SF, Portland, Seattle and elsewhere. The phone number on the respective cities flyers was for the local Cacophony Chapter.

**Painter Thomas Kinkade, In A Willder Light**

T Julian Guthrie, Chronicle Staff Writer  
uesday, November 17, 2009

It was a slice of Bohemia in a city of commerce, a gathering of intellectuals striking out against what they see as mindless and saccharin art.

On Friday night, dozens of artists converged on a small underground gallery off a dark and narrow alley in the heart of North Beach. The gallery on Bannam Place - which for decades has drawn poets and painters and bootleggers - hosted a one-night show called "Kinkade Cannibalized! An Exhibition of Augmented Thomas Kinkade Paintings."

Kinkade, who calls himself the "Painter of Light" and is said to be the most collected living artist in America, creates images of Christmas chapels dusted in snow, of cottages next to placid lakes, of mountain paradises, of the perfect yellow rose and of pools of serenity.

"A lot of artists really sort of loathe Thomas Kinkade," said Kevin Evans, who curated the show. "Not just because of his very simple and extremely idealized and conservative view of the world, but because it's formulaic painting that creates a static and stagnant image."

Evans, who contributed two pieces to the show, added: "I figured it would be a cathartic exercise for us, basically using humor and art to sort of critique something and communicate a message."

One of Evans' works was called "The Bloodshot Eye of the Beholder." Evans created a "badly done San Francisco landscape with a bloodshot eye in the middle," explaining: "It gives you bloodshot eyes to have to look at Kinkade's works."

In all, there were more than 20 pieces, ranging from paintings and multimedia sculpture to a diorama light

box, a meat cleaver cutting cheese and several collage works.

Carrie Galbraith, a conceptual artist who does book design, created an artists' book that mixed Kinkade's fantasy images with more reality-based images.

"The book I did is a response to Kinkade's way of looking at life and making everything a fantasy world," said Galbraith, who in the 1980s and '90s was a member of the San Francisco Cacophony Society, a group formed to make statements through art and satire.

"I used Kinkade's stone bridges to move to these images of factories and pollution and global warming, images that depict the reality we face in the environment," Galbraith said.

The show was held in the gallery and studio of longtime San Francisco artist Winston Smith, best known for his collages for musicians and punk artists, including the Dead Kennedys.

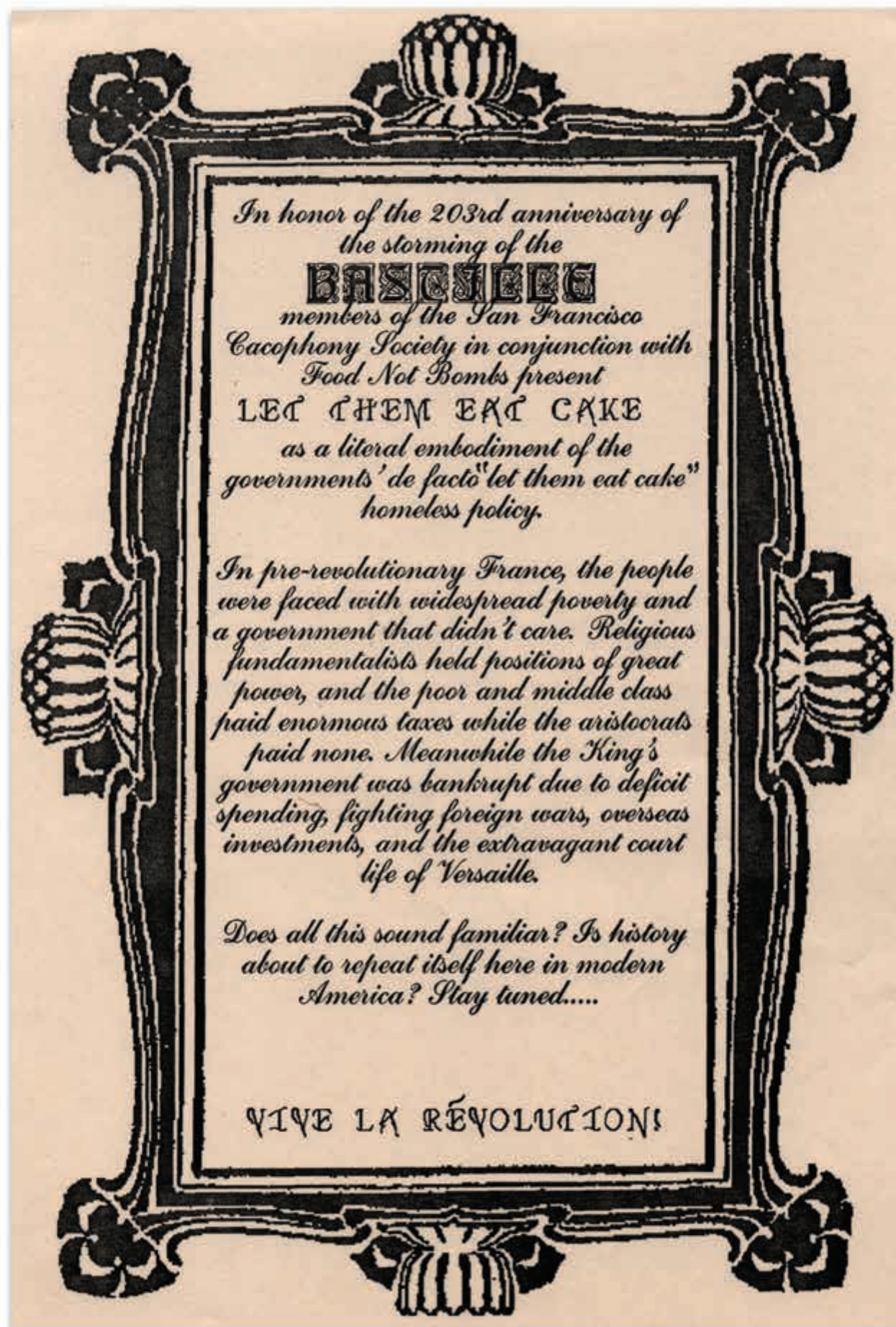
"Kinkade has a formula," Smith said, holding court at the back of his studio, behind a draped curtain. "The bourgeois attitude that this is art is insulting."

Sitting nearby was Ron Turner, the founder and publisher of Last Gasp comic books. Turner, who was one of the first publishers to feature the work of the now widely known illustrator R. Crumb, said he also has published a book on Kinkade's work.

"I'm not anti-Kinkade," Turner said. "I think he gets under everyone's skin because he glorifies the fairy tale. Kinkade is a master marketer, and I think the idealizing of the images is Kinkade's own inside joke."



This 2009 creative reunion of the Cacophony Society was a prankish exhibition lampooning the pastoral paintings of the infamous franchise artist Thomas Kinkade. Above: Stuart Mangrum's semi-readymade objet trouvé *Cutting the Cheese*, a stainless steel cleaver imprinted with the bucolic Kinkade illustration of a rustic mountain cabin, viciously submerges itself in a large stack of processed cheese. Facing page: Splice, a bay area illustrator, critiques a typical Kinkade Arcadian hamlet. Curated by Kevin Evans and Carrie Galbraith. Participating artists: Kevin Evans, Tara Evans, David Ewald, Carrie Galbraith, Marsha Grant, Margaret Griffis, Sebastian Hyde, Steven Johnson Leyba, Michelle Mangrum, Stuart Mangrum, Suzanne Onodera, Winston Smith, Splice, and Trey Xander.



**Let Them Eat Cake**

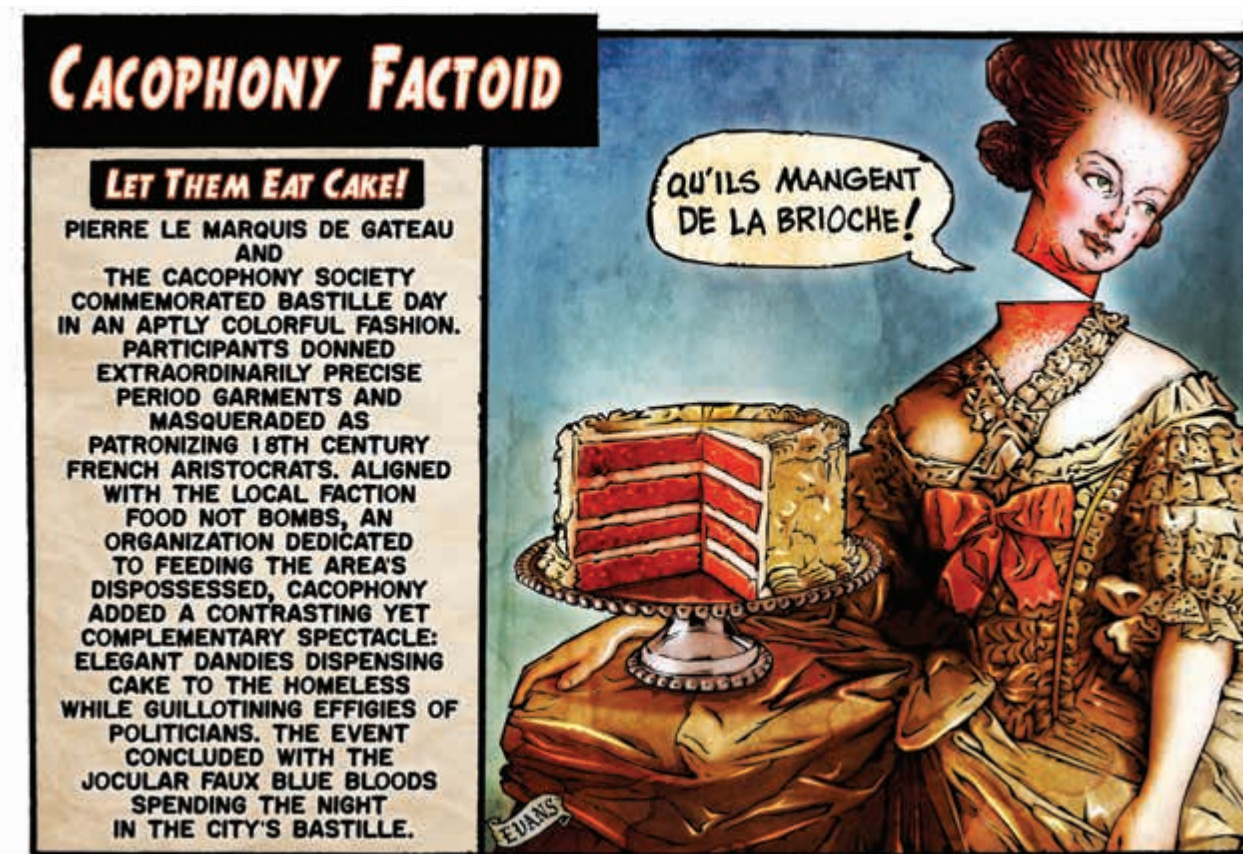
*When: Wednesday, July 14th (Bastille Day), 11:15am*  
*Encore! Encore! Once again Let Them Eat Cake, a group of 18th century French Aristocrats, joins forces/faces with Food Not Bombs to give SF's homeless dessert with a costumed spectacle. This event will end with a grand procession to the Mayor's office to present the last crumb.*  
*Your host: Pierre, Le Marquis du Gateau*  
 — Rough Draft, July, 1994

**Sounds Like Cacophony**

*Bastille Day is upon us once again, which means that Let Them Eat Cake will take to the streets in encore giving cake to SF's homeless. This year's festivities may include the guillotining in-effigy of Mayor Frank Jordan, Supervisor "Marie Antoinette" Conroy and Governor Pete Willson. Participants should be prepared to dress in 18th century aristocratic-like attire, provide enough frosted cake for 25 people, and help pay for event costs. There will be guillotine refurbishing and effigy making workshops in the weeks preceding Bastille Day which is Thursday, July 14th. Midday. Call for a reservation and to get the time and location of the event and workshops.*  
*Your host: Pierre, Le Marquis du Gateau*  
 — Rough Draft, April, 1995

**Clown Night at Clown Alley (Or, What D'ya Think of My Poker Face Now, Bozo?)**

*When: Saturday, July 13th, 8:30pm*  
*Where: Meet at Tosca Café, Columbus Ave.*  
*An infamous event from the storied past of a certain notorious adventure group ancestral to Cacophony, an event that many people know about but few attended, involved a menacing accumulation of clowns in an unexpected context. Participants distributed themselves at bus stops along a certain MUNI route, and on cue they inexplicably boarded a randomly-selected bus, one or two at a time-presumably leaving the innocent passengers permanently disturbed, if not twisted.*  
*Tonight we will gather in full clown regalia to attempt to recreate the eerie ambiance of that legendary event. After planning the exact timing and nuances of the psychic assault to the strains of opera at a favorite bistro, we will execute the plan at a well-known and aptly-named purveyor of carnivia on lower Columbus, possibly followed by one or two additional tableaux (B.Y.O.Idea). We will then retire to a more private setting for a friendly game of Clown Poker. Some people find it easier to be inscrutable in white face.*  
*ps: No rabid Vegan clown protesters please, I picture an event that is eerily magical rather than obnoxious.*  
*Your host: Urban (Koko) Shocker and his fiendishly cute sidekicks, Clarabelle and Buffoonery Bob.*  
 — Rough Draft, July, 1991



Facing page: Pierre, le marquis de Gateau's invitation for the public to join in for the 1st "Let Them Eat Cake."



“How many ways can crybabies parse shame and blame? In San Francisco last month, a motley flock turned out to picket the classic Disney movie *Fantasia*. One man complained that the spooky *Night on Bald Mountain* scene had terrified his child. Members of an organization called Dieters United objected to the tutu-clad hippos frolicking to the music of *Dance of the Hours*; the protesters felt the sequence ridiculed fat people. Conservationists were appalled at the waste of water in *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*.

Fundamentalist Christians bewailed the depiction of evolution in *Rite of Spring*. Antidrug forces suspected something subliminally prodrug in the *Nutcracker Suite* episode featuring dancing mushrooms. Only *Fantasia* conductor escaped chastisement, perhaps because he is dead.”

—*Time Magazine*, August 12, 1991

**Fantasia Cult/Protest**

When: Sunday, April 28th, 5:00pm

Where: Meet at the Castro MUNI station

Events:

A) Uptight protest demonstration against Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*, outside the Castro Theater, for its “evil” and/or “politically incorrect” themes.

B) Counter protest by loyal *Fantasia* freaks.

C) Cult movie performance, as though *Fantasia* was our favorite film which we’ve seen dozens of times. Musicians can play along with Stokowski’s orchestra. The audience can shout silly pre-arranged as well as spontaneous catch phrases. Weird things can be tossed at appropriated moments. Costumed fans can go on stage and act out their

favorite parts with the movie. A candle-light procession will be held during the Ave Maria finale, and more!

Bring:

1) Money for movie and popcorn.

2) Signs, pro and con.

3) Costume (*Fantasia* theme or protester)

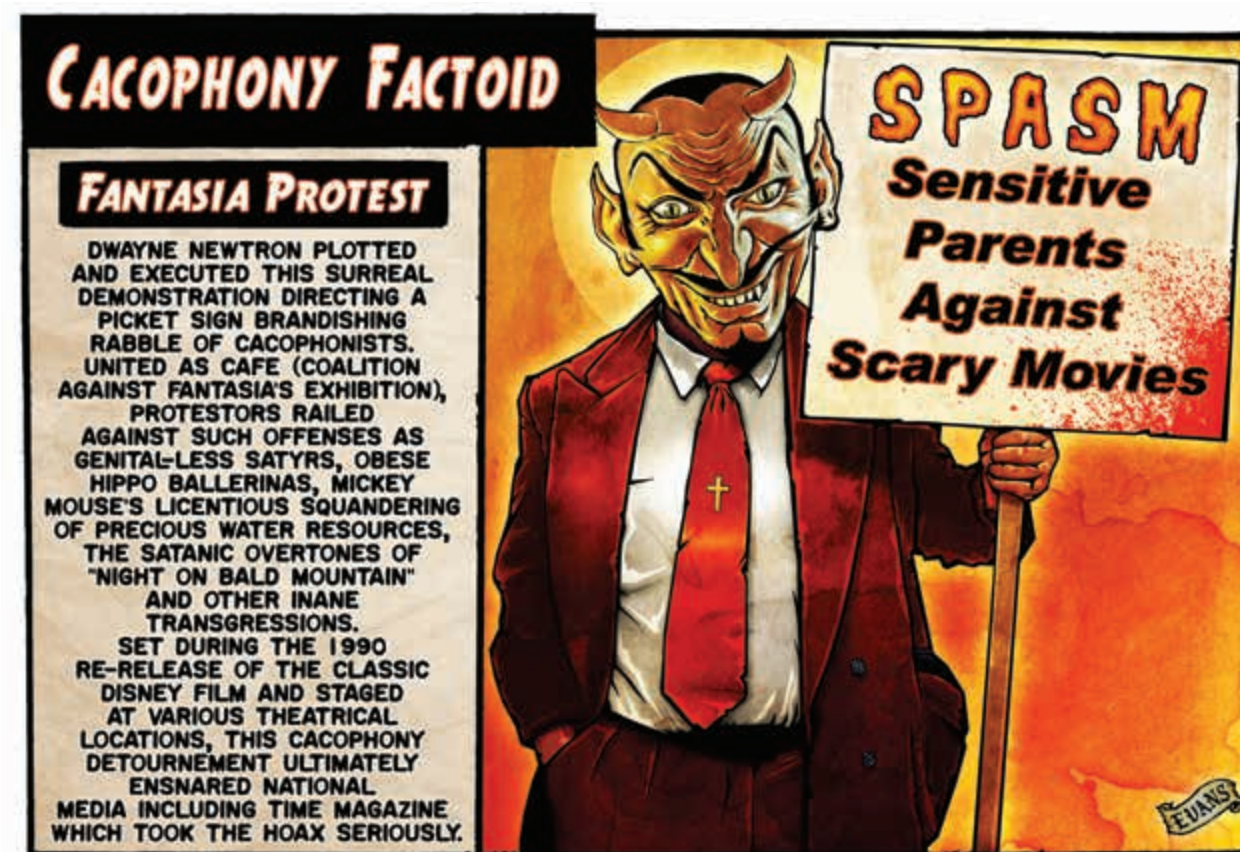
4) Harmless things to throw (bring enough to share)

5) Ideas of things to shout

Hint: If you plan to perform but haven’t seen *Fantasia* recently, you can go to an earlier showing at the Castro at 1:00 or 3:45. That way you will know what happens and when.

Your host: Dwayne Newtron

— Rough Draft, July, 1994



Facing page: C.A.F.E. (Coalition Against *Fantasia*’s Exhibition) pickets the Castro Theater in San Francisco’s Castro District. Following pages: More protesters give it to Disney for the audacity of showing *Fantasia* in sensitive San Francisco. The C.A.F.E. organizing flyer presents a dizzying alphabet soup of politically correct acronyms.

**The Coalition Against Fantasia's Exhibition (C.A.F.E.)** will be holding a protest demonstration outside the Castro Theater in San Francisco on Sunday, April 28th, at 5:30 pm.

C.A.F.E. is an association of Bay Area organizations which opposes the various "unacceptable" themes expressed in Walt Disney's Film *Fantasia*. The following is a partial list of some of these organizations and their arguments:

- Bay Area Say No to Drugs Committee:**  
is opposed to the chemical abuse references of dancing mushrooms and opium poppies, and of the mythological characters becoming intoxicated from wine.
- Dieters United:**  
is offended by the hippopotamus and elephant ballerinas and the callous stereotypes of individuals with weight disorders that they portray.
- B.A.D.R.A.P. (Bay Area Drought Relief Alliance Party):**  
feels that water conservation efforts will be hindered by showing Mickey Mouse's wanton waste of water in the "Sorcerers Apprentice" sequence.
- S.P.A.S.M. (Sensitive Parents Against Scary Movies):**  
believes that the film's visual and contextual intensity stimulates cycles of depression and fear in small children and that they are not properly forewarned by the "G" rating.
- M.A.S.A. (Musicians Against Sappy Arrangements):**  
Is offended by Stokowski's sanitized orchestral arrangement because it "...allows great works of art to be cheapened for commercial profit!"

A variety of religious organizations plan to denounce the "Evolution" sequence as well as the Satanic Glorification of "Night on Bald Mountain" including the naked Cupids.

Minority, Feminist, and Gay/Lesbian groups will voice their opposition to the color coordinated, stereotypical heterosexual centaurs from the "Pastoral", which they feel promotes racism, sexism, and homophobia.

C.A.F.E. hopes that you will cover this important symbolic event to make it clear to Walt Disney Studios®, and the entertainment industry, that the Bay Area says "NO" to *Fantasia* and the images that it represents.

For more information contact C.A.F.E. co-coordinator, Dwayne Newtron @

**Night Crawler - As Berkeley as They Want**  
Silke Tudor, *SF Weekly*, September 30, 1998

"If God didn't want us to eat people," poses Vinnie Pescado, "why did he make them taste like meat?" Pescado grins and lurches into the crowd gathered on University Avenue for the annual How Berkeley Can You Be? Parade. The throng parts easily at the sight of Pescado's blood-splattered slicker, then closes around him, resuming clapping as if the bloody apparition were as common as incense peddlers at BART. A parade float comes into view. Afro-Cuban rhythms fill the damp morning air, giving impetus to 12 Caucasian women in flowered dresses and a man in a gold toga who interpret the beat with shameless undulations.

"This sort of music is so primal," says a white-haired resident named Jeanine Paley, who smiles and claps appreciatively as the dancers pass.

"As primal as meat?" sneers a spiky-haired gent in a lab coat who appears at her shoulder and vanishes into the crowd. A raw chicken claw flies through the air and lands near Paley's feet.

"What was that? What did that man say?" asks Paley, looking around in time to miss him.

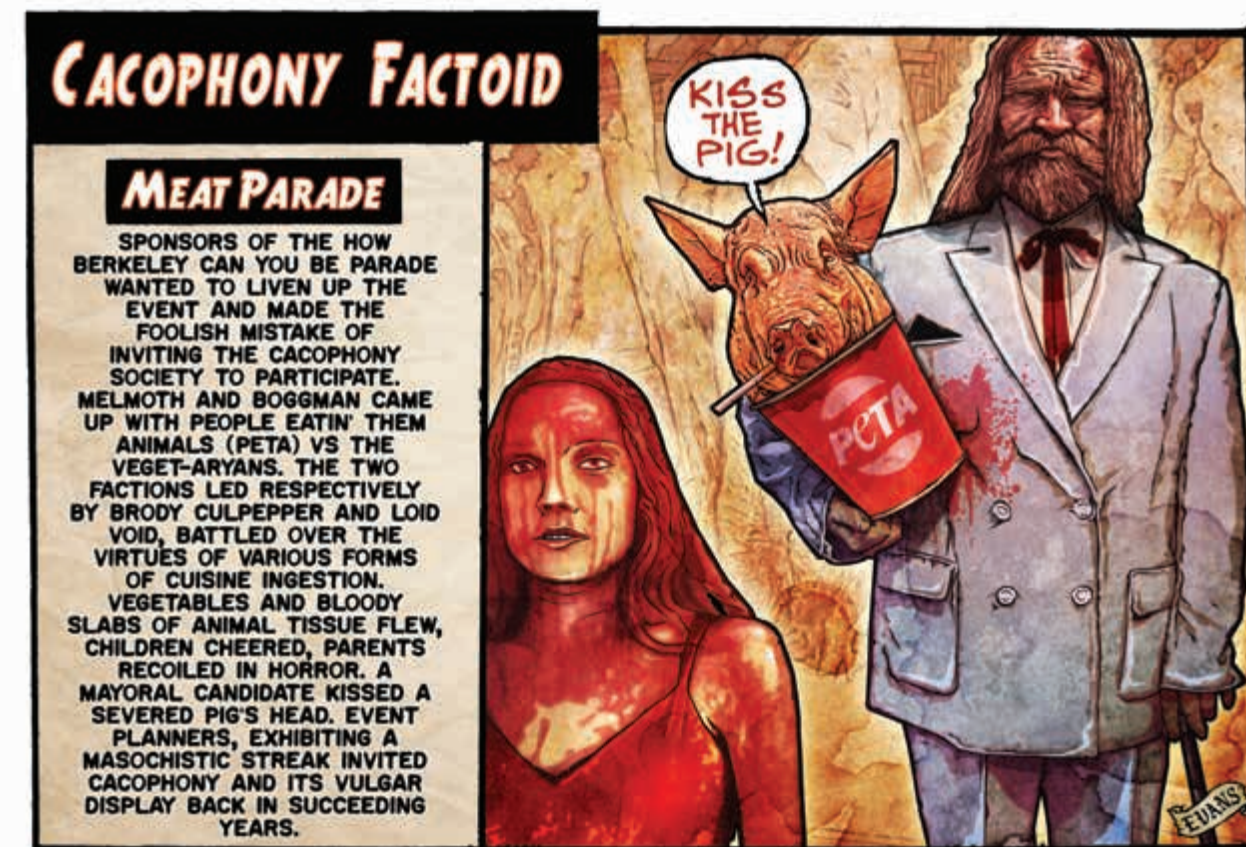
"Something about meat," answers her companion calmly.

Paley frowns, but a string of exceptional artcars distracts her from her odd encounter.

Down the road, the X-Plicit Players -- a group of nude performers who have become an unavoidable part of every Berkeley gathering -- are not so lucky. While peacefully preparing to walk through the center of town with their tackle swinging in the wind, a wild-eyed man in a bright orange Doggie Diner shirt charges at them, waving a chain saw. The man -- known as Sebastian Melmoth -- executes an impressive shoulder roll and lands on his feet with the chain saw roaring overhead. Through the deafening noise, the nudists make out his suggestive incantation: "Wieners! Wieners! Wieners!"

Not surprisingly, the X-Plicit Players scatter, regrouping amid nervous laughter only when Melmoth has retreated back to his own float.

On the PETA (People Eat'n Them Animals) float loom three enormous Doggie Diner heads with their frozen wiener-dog grins. Members of PETA, men and women in bloodied butchers' clothes, stand on the float smoking cheap cigarettes and tending to several barbecues, which rest between the dog heads. Great billows of dark smoke fill the air with the smell of roasting meat. A monstrous mechanical jaw chomps on a large, raw



Facing page: Restaurateur John Solomon founded the How Berkeley Can You Be? Parade as a way to encourage commerce, while celebrating and showcasing the truly weird groups that abound in and around Berkeley, California. Solomon contacted Sebastian Melmoth prior to the first parade in 1996 with an offer to "do whatever you like." Cacophony responded with People Eat'n Them Animals.



pig's head. Several other cloudy-eyed pig's faces hang thawing on stakes mounted to the side of the truck. Chain saws drown out the sound of surrounding festival music as the butchers chase down two men dressed in cow suits. A woman wearing a demonic monkey mask and a bloodied ball gown tosses hunks of hamburger to the crowd while another PETA member tries to lure folks from the sidelines with mystery meat hooked on a fishing line.

Brody Culpepper, co-founder of Big Rig Industries and a consummate carnivore, leads the procession with a bullhorn.

"All right, all you Berkeley hippies, it's time to put down that Nutragrain Bar and pick up a sausage. Meat is your God-given right as an American!" he informs the crowd.

"Barbecue in the morning smells like victory!" shouts someone from the float.

A pretty young woman draped in fur and leather works the crowd, handing out hot dogs and cigarettes to small children. Parents laugh, trying to maintain their "Only in Berkeley" facetiousness as their young ones are corrupted.

"I love meat," says a 14-year-old skate rat who grew up in Berkeley but feels the allure of PETA. "My first words were, 'More meat.' I swear to you that's true."

A toddler in a stroller reaches his tiny hand toward a proffered hot dog. The child's watchful mother intervenes just in time, pushing her son's hand gently out of harm's way.

"But he wants it," coos the PETA member. The Berkeley mother smiles tolerantly.

"Beef's not just for breakfast anymore!" comes the call.

The indulgent crowd roars with laughter as the butchers begin carving the pig heads, creating a flurry of pink pig flakes that stick in everyone's hair.

"Don't laugh," shouts *Twisted Times* Editor Stuart Mangrum through the business-end of a bullhorn. "By laughing, you only encourage them. There is nothing funny about colon plaque. There is nothing funny about meat."

Armed with carrots, jackboots, and brown shirts, Mangrum and the Veget-Aryans have come on the scene as a combative antidote to PETA's bloody message of feasting. They carry signs that read "You Smell Like Death," "I Pity Your Colon," and "Meat Is a Hate Crime." Culpepper calls the group vegan fascists, but the men in cow suits are happy for their protection. PETA hurls epithets and meat at the Veget-Aryans, but they keep coming, using carrot sticks as ammunition.

Only when the parade passes a McDonald's do the plant eaters waver from their intent, turning their signs and their attention on customers carrying little greasy to-go bags filled with burgers. The man-cows recoil in horror and must be shielded from the sight by the helpful, right-thinking Aryans. PETA launches hot beef at them with a meat cannon. The crowd is showered in fleshy shrapnel, but the Veget-Aryans are unfazed. A chain-saw-toting butcher attacks one of the Aryans, carving his sign to ribbons, then turns on Mangrum. Mangrum remains calm.

"You look as though you want to attack me," says Mangrum, quietly placing his hand on the butcher's arm, "but I know this is just a call for help." Turning toward one of his henchmen he adds, "Give this man a carrot."

"The Veget-Aryans are insidious," warns Culpepper. "They're trying to control your mind. You can't trust them."

As the parade nears the end of its route, PETA throws the remains of the pig heads in the street and invites youngsters to stomp on the faces until they are nothing more than porky, pink mounds. Adults from the parade look on in amusement. A Veget-Aryan is seen sharing a plate of barbecued pork under a tree with a woman wearing animal pelts. In a startling act of unity, ambassadors from PETA and the Veget-Aryans carry a skinless sheep head to Shirley Dean, acting mayor of Berkeley, requesting that she kiss it. She declines with a large politician's smile. Her opponent, Don Jelinek, on the other hand, acquiesces, giving him a corner on the carnivore's vote. Parade onlookers applaud and laugh heartily.

Speaking for us all, Sebastian Melmoth muses, "It's really hard to be punk these days."



Above: Don Paul Swain worked for the Chiodo Brothers Special Effects company as a monster maker. Using stock props from "B" zombie movies, he suited up Cacophony for the Berkeley parade. The Living Dead Homeowners Association in 1999 was perhaps the first massive Zombie attack to take place on the North American continent. Facing page: As with any good Berkeley protest, counter protestors are a requirement. The Veget-Aryans marched to decry P.E.T.A.'s insensitive butchering of innocent animals during an earlier Berkeley parade.



**Race of Doom**

Stuart Mangrum  
*Twisted Times* no.17 – 1995

July 9, 1995 – San Francisco, CA – What started as an oddball prank took a tragic turn today as onetime counterculture scenester and San Francisco Cacophony Society member Timothy Liddy apparently plunged to his death in the icy waters of the Golden Gate. Though officials expressed concern that the dive may have been accidental, or even a result of foul play, others were quick to proclaim Liddy the 1,000th person to commit suicide by jumping from the historic span.

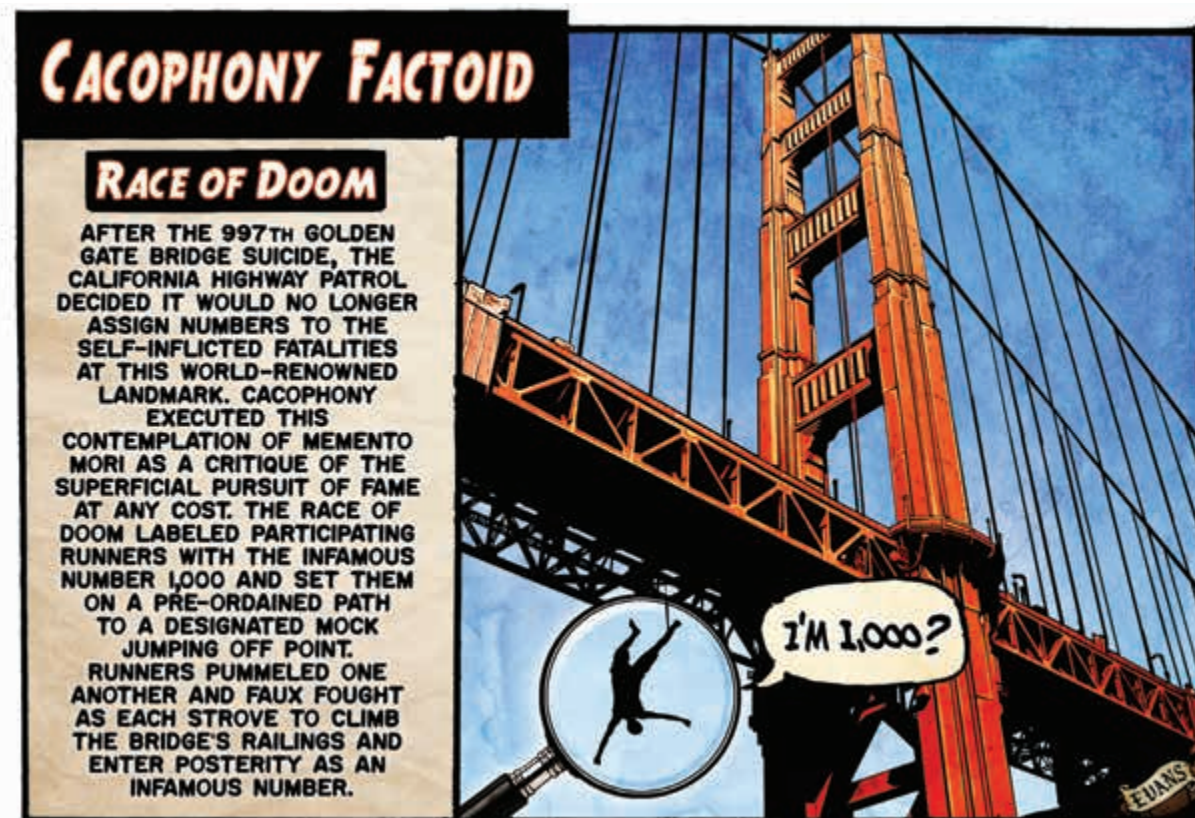
The trouble started when sixteen members of the Cacophony Society, a longtime fixture on the local underground scene, chose the day of the San Francisco marathon to dress up in jogging togs, strap on the number 1000, and race to the center of the bridge in a simulated mass suicide. An article in *The Examiner* the previous day had set the official death toll at 999, and expressed law enforcement concerns that people would be “lining up to be number 1000.” The Cacophonists responded with their ill-fated “Race of Doom,” with official-looking race placards for all the runners. “It was just a joke,” explained Cacophony spokesman Lloyd Void. “We’re just a bunch of harmless kids having fun.”

Liddy, on the other hand, was no kid, and according to some sources far from harmless. After nearly achieving

notoriety in the 60’s as the unindicted eighth conspirator in the Chicago Seven case, the 45-year-old Liddy went underground in 1976 under a cloud of drug, weapons, and money laundering charges. Authorities were guarded when asked about Liddy’s background. One source, who asked not to be identified, expressed doubt that the jumper could have been Liddy at all, since Liddy was known by the CIA to be in Cuba with longtime acquaintance and golfing companion Robert Vesco. Noting that no body had been recovered from the bay, he implied that the whole affair was nothing more than “a crude attempt at disinformation, possibly by the Mossad.”

Eyewitnesses on the bridge, however, insist that a man matching Liddy’s description jumped, or was pushed, or accidentally fell from the railing at mid-span at about 6:25 PM. Members of the Cacophony Society were apparently involved in a spirited shoving match, each trying to climb up the rail ahead of the other, when Liddy allegedly went over the side.

Liddy, whose autobiography “I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead” has been tied up in litigation since 1992, leaves no known survivors. His publishers, Duke Press, referred a request for comment to their Accounts Receivable department.



Facing page: Runners compete to be the 1000th jumper from the *Golden Gate Bridge* during the *Race of Doom*. Although no one would attest to it under oath, several competitors claimed (after a few drinks) to have seen Timothy Liddy hurl into the void during the melee. M2, Stuart Berg, and infant stand by as L.L. Fauntleroy “goes for the gold.”

**BART**  
**ba** BART Lounge Questionnaire

How many days/week do you use BART?

1  2  3  4  5  6 or more

How would you rate this evening's entertainment?

1  2  3  4  5

What kinds of acts would you like to see on the BART Lounge?

- Opera
- Ballet
- Movies
- Other

Should we designate any BART cars as non-entertainment?

Yes  No

Are you interested in becoming a BART Lounge entertainer?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Your Act \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your valuable opinion. We hope you enjoyed the show. Please return your completed questionnaire before exiting the BART Lounge.



**BART LOUNGE**

Friday, January 25, 5:30 pm (meet) - 6:15 (depart)  
Where: Glen Park Bart Station, just inside station, SF  
Hey there, you truly fabulous people! BART is going Vegas! This will be a truly incredible evening of entertainment, when the evening commute BART train is transformed into a Las Vegas-styled lounge. We are looking for three sorts of people to join in:

1. If you have an act (comedy/magic/showgirl or any other entertainment) be prepared to perform.
  2. If you want to be part of the atmosphere, come decked out in your best Vegas wear.
  3. If you want to dress "straight" we do need plants to blend in with the commuters.
- Remember, you in the audience are the ones we truly, truly love the most!

—Rough Draft, January 1991

**The Bart Lounge**

Rat Girl

As much as we all liked to entertain each other, we really loved it when we could play to an unsuspecting audience. The BART train between San Francisco and the East Bay was our perfect playground. One Friday evening we all boarded BART and our MC announced to the passengers that this was a pilot project that BART was testing to bring entertainment to riders on Friday evenings.

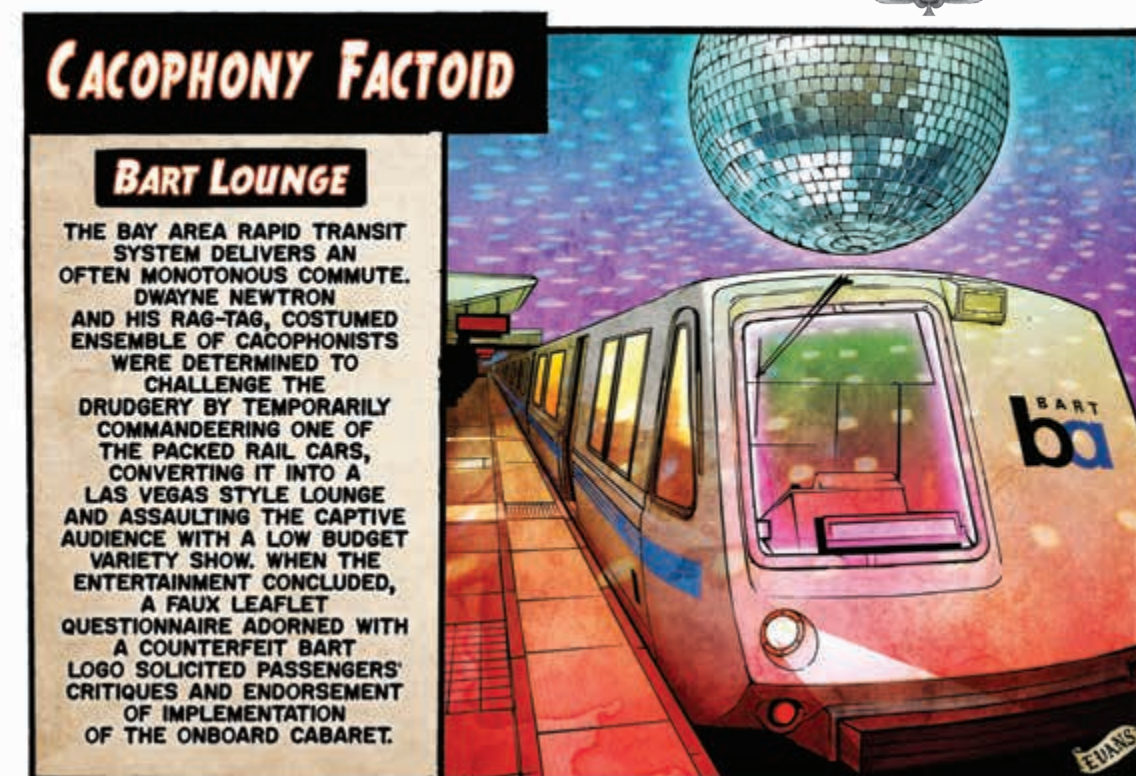
We proceeded to "entertain" the passengers with such acts as "Duane and Dusty" (Peter Doty and Sara

Rosenbaum), a dynamic duo straight from Vegas and the amazing "Shirley Bassey" (Robert Hubbard in the most believable Shirley drag) singing her great Bond hit "Goldfinger." Along with assorted magic acts, poets, and total silliness, we "entertained" passengers all the way to the end of the line.

I was the cigarette girl with a 1950s night club tray around my neck, offering cigars, cigarettes, chewing gum, and condoms, accompanied by a pet rat courtesy of the rat girls, climbing all over the tray. We even handed out surveys to the passengers asking them to let BART know which were their favorite acts, and would they would like this to be a regular feature of the Friday night commute.

On the return trip two young guys boarded the train in Hayward. They were dressed in nice suits and ties, on their way to meet their dates in the city. I climbed in one of the guy's lap and started flirting with him. As I played with his hair, the rat climbed off my tray and on to his shoulder, where it let go with a very messy, gooey shit. I was sure the guy was going to start screaming at me but instead he turned out to be a great sport. He laughed, tried to clean off the mess, and said that this was going to be a great story to tell his date.

He gave me his card and subsequently came to many parties that my husband and I had at our home over the years. This is how I met Mark Harmond, who is one of the best sports I have ever met.



Facing page: Dwayne and Dusty singing in the BART Lounge. The questionnaire was handed to all commuters boarding BART cars during Dwayne Newtron's recreation of a Vegas variety stage performance. Following pages: Press releases for Rosebud Technologies and the "faster than the speed of light" modem to be unveiled at MacWorld, 1990.

The Cacaphony Society and Spud Parlor Present

SILL  
MARA

Burn The Past

The Future

This MAGIC coupon admits two for one night at the:  
THE 2nd FIRST ANNUAL CACOPHONY DRIVE-IN MOVIE FESTIVAL

admits two

Our second year promises to be twice as good with a BYOF picnic/B.B.Q. and an additional evening of gut provoking and thought wrenching entertainment. will happen Friday and Saturday, July 5th and 6th. at Marin and Illinois streets in San Francisco at 9:30 pm.



- WHAT YOU GET
- 1 Free Admission to the Festival Event
  - 2 We have a deal to send a collection of the best entries, with your permission if yours is selected, to programmers at major broadcast venues, including Bravo, BBC and MTV London for possible broadcast
  - 3 Prizes

Really Bad Films

And some Really good ones too  
B.y.o.f B.B.Q. on SAT. @ 3:30pm!



Bring a Chair!!  
2nd Annual Cacophony Drive-In Movie Festival  
Friday and Saturday  
July 5 and 6, 1990  
Illinois and Marin Streets, S.F.  
9:30 pm (both nights)

The grounds, entrance at the corner of Marin & Illinois, south of Army Street, off of 3rd (Earth has one moon).  
celebrity Marty Marky will conduct the gala awards presentation ceremony. Prizes awarded in 6 different categories. Les Blank and many other film-makers will be featured (see photo).  
This festive event will take place on Saturday, August 19, 1995. The trivia quiz will begin at 9:00 p.m., Sharp!  
The admission for a motor vehicle (unlimited species occupancy) is \$5.00. Pedestrian is \$3.00. Carpooling encouraged. However, no "making out" or "necking", as it's referred to on this planet. No bicycles, motorized scooters or unicycles. Motorcycles at Pedestrian fee. Art Cars FREE with coupon!

CACOPHONY DRIVE-IN MOVIE VIDEO FESTIVAL

Release  
TE  
Festival. We are proud to  
winners and indomitable

24 Hour Twin Peaks Marathon

When: Saturday, March 9th, 3:00pm until...  
Starting with the first episode and continuing right up to the present, we will eat junk food (lots of jelly donuts and cherry pie), write and read Laura's diary, indulge in a game of chance at One-Eyed Jacks and view all the episodes of Twin Peaks. Bring a sleeping bag or your favorite snuggly blanket and pillow, a homemade cherry pie for the pie-baking contest, lots of nickels and dimes to squander at One-Eyed Jack's Casino, alcoholic libations to get us through the night and appropriate food to share and your personal coffee mug at the Double R Diner. Wear costumes of your favorite characters. We'll break at approximately 6am for breakfast. The owl knows all.

—Rough Draft, March, 1991

The Starship Lounge

When: Saturday, November 4th, 8:00 pm  
Where: Fillmore, between Oak and Page, SF  
A starship has landed in San Francisco for R&R. Shields around the ship disguise it as a Victorian house, but enter and you will find the Starship Video Lounge. Louie Lasar and Ann T. Matter of Spud Parlor Productions have designed a Video Cabaret from the not so distant future...  
Bring: Drink and party food to share

Don your best retro-futuristic space gear for a jaunt through inner space. Come at 8 pm for best seating. Cabaret begins at 8:30 sharp.

—Rough Draft, November, 1989

Lost Theaters of San Francisco

When: Saturday, March 21st, 2 pm  
Meet: Front steps of the Main Library, Larkin & McAllister Sts.  
In 1955 there were over 75 theaters in the City. In 1992 there exists only 35. Now that we have some facts and photos under our belts, we are set to begin our exploration of the actual sites of former cinematic shrines. Our first trip will take us down Market Street, where we will try to find evidence of the many theaters which once existed there. Bring along any souvenirs or photographs you may have of now defunct Market Street movie palaces. Our plan is to document our tour with photographs and then install our own, small, commemorative plaque at each historic locations.  
Your hosts: Beulah Bond and Winslow  
—Rough Draft, March, 1992

I Like My Film & My Coffee Black!

When: Saturday, August 10th, 6:00 pm sharp  
Meet: 7th and Lincoln, near the Baseball Diamond.  
Join us as we enliven the Pacific Film Archive's film noir series by showing up to see THE PHOENIX CITY STORY and KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL in our best sleazy '40s and '50s attire: snap brim hats and sneers for men; slinky dresses and coy

looks for women. And .38's wherever you wanna hide 'em.  
Your host: Mugsby Spaulding

—Rough Draft, August, 1991

Lost in Space Video Marathon & Time Warp Experience

When: Saturday, April 28th, 6:00 pm  
Where: Judah near 19th Ave.

Rescue the Robinsons from memory loss. Link up with Earth Alpha Control and be prepared to destroy the inertial guidance as we exit the galaxy. Your life support hosts for the evening are Gregg Wallace & Ronn Rosen. (And perhaps Richard Nixon will show up.) Please bring space food, liquidities, robots, and a monkey that goes bloop-bloop. Dress in space attire is optional.

—Rough Draft, April, 1990

A Night In The Village

When: Sat/Sun, February 6 & 7, 8:30pm - 10am  
Where: 9th Ave., between Balboa & Cabrillo, SF  
"What do you want?" "Information."  
The Prisoner series, non-stop, all-night, come and watch. Then see if you can leave...  
Your host: Caré  
—Rough Draft, February, 1988

Surrealist's Wannabe Home Video Collage Festival

When: Thursday, September 27th, 8:00 pm  
Where: Lincoln & 4th Ave, SF  
Legend has it that Salvador Dali and Andre Breton, at the height of the surrealist movement in Paris in the '20s, used to have a special way of watching movies. They would hop from theater to theater, walking in on each film at a random time. They would stay only until they started to figure out what was going on in the plot, and then they'd leave immediately. Their visual experience was thus entirely abstract. That's the idea of this video festival. Armed only with the necessities of modern life, a TV and VCR with remote controls, today's couch potato virtuosos are encouraged to mine the late-night palette of visual jetsam and flotsam for the distilled gems of collective unconscious. The technique for harvesting these cultural icons is simple: just put your VCR in 'record' and 'pause' then flip the channels until you see something interesting. Then hit 'pause' at the beginning and end of sections you want. If you hit 'stop,' rewind just a little and hit 'record' and 'pause' again... this way should get invisible edits and weave a rich tapestry out of a few nights of insomnia. Remember, we are not looking for the first layer of meaning: keep your clips fairly short and nonsensical. We will probably have a time limit, 15 minutes, depending on the number of entrants to the video festival.  
—Rough Draft, September, 1990

Facing page: The first and second annual Cacophony drive-in movie festival, curated by Shelby Toland, eventually morphed into the Brainwash Movie Festival, which continues to this day.

**Operatic Banquet**

*When: Saturday, February 2nd, 8:00pm  
 Meet: 7th Ave and Lincoln Way, just inside the park at the baseball diamond  
 All you lounge lizards that missed your calling at the Fabulous Bart Lounge - here's your chance to shine! We'll be going to 19th Ave. Bar & Grill to hone up on our skills with the help of their Karoke machine. (It will play background music to any tune you like without complaining.)  
 After our vocal chords are vibrating with glee, we will exit to a local spaghetti house to boggle and bemuse the minds around us. Costumes encouraged!  
 Bring: your voice, a healthy appetite, funds to cover your meal and a goblet for toasting.  
 Your host: Zasu  
 — Rough Draft, August, 1987*

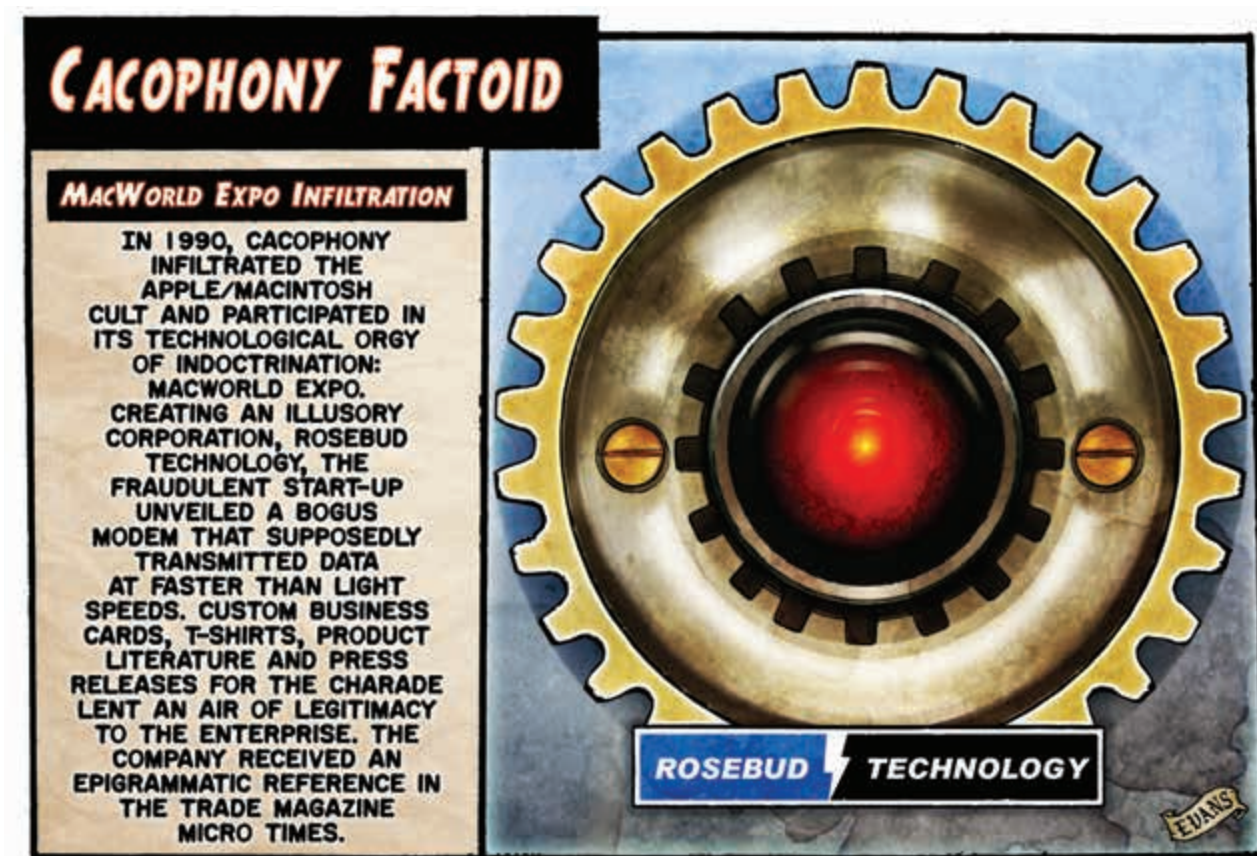
**Downtown is Such a Drag**

*When: Thursday, May 26, 11:30am  
 Meet: In McKesson Plaza between street level and the BART/MUNI station at Montgomery and Market Streets  
 Anyone who has ever witnessed the horrors of SF's financial district at midday knows that its corporate-zombie denizens are in severe need of having their cages rattled. Let's mock their conformist existence by dressing conservatively in drag, walking the streets and riding the elevators, seemingly*

*oblivious to each other as if we were each just part of the crowd. Cross dress in conservative business attire (remember, we want to look like we are in drag, not actually pass).  
 Bring: power lunch money for a yuppie establishment after the event.  
 Your hostess: Dame Fredirica Downey  
 — Rough Draft, May, 1994*

**The Un-Cacophony Event**

*When: Monday, November 11th, 3 pm  
 Meet: Dogshit Park, Carl Street near Cole Street (at the MUNI tunnel). Actual location to be disclosed.  
 How many times have you found yourself somewhere (mysterious, dreamlike, stunning), and thought, "This would be a great place for a Cacophony event!" Too many, if you are normal. Now we have a chance to avoid that sort of distraction. This event is guaranteed to be un-mysterious, un-dreamlike, and un-stunning. Boring, if you will.  
 Please bring: Coupons to trade, casserole recipes to share, TV Guide crossword puzzles, and money for Jello.  
 How: You must take public transit. Bring transfer stub as proof. An un-exciting time will be had by all.  
 Absolutely NO COSTUMES!  
 Your host: Mrs. Miller  
 — Rough Draft, November, 1991*



Facing page: The "memo" sent out to Cacophony agents calling for participation in the launching of Rosebud Technologies.

# SOUTHERN PACIFIC MEMORIAL HOSPITALS, INC.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
1400 FELL STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO 17, CALIFORNIA

C. T. GREER  
PRESIDENT  
S. E. THISTLE  
SECRETARY



## Techniques of Abduction 101

1. Two teams get together and choose two people to kidnap from the participants who have arrived at the warehouse. Each team tells the other teams what location they will kidnap their participants to.
2. The teams go and kidnap the participants. One member of each team collects the participant's photograph and brings it to the other team. If they didn't bring photographs then use descriptions.
3. Both participants are given the descriptions or photographs and told that they must find and kill that other participant before that other participant finds and kills them first. Explain these rules to each participant:
  - a) Participants kill each other by squeezing shoulders only.
  - b) When a participant is killed, s/he must gag, rattle, gurgle, scream, or in some other way vocalize that they've been killed.
  - c) When a participant kills someone, he/she must loudly give vent to their satisfaction upon completion of a successful homicide by saying things like, "Revenge is sweet", "Make my day! Make my day!", or "You'll never lay a hand on my orangutang again!"
4. Kidnap Teams repeat this cycle with as many participants as they can manage.

### Urban Exploration and Games

The gleaming, unknown urban landscape was the backdrop, playing field, and in some instances, the inspiration for many events. The group might exit an unlit, out of service train tunnel, squeeze through a stone gate into a mausoleum, through a hole in a fence and onto a military compound, or perhaps canoe under the wharves, landing in an abandoned shipyard. Then, standing on a concrete abutment overlooking what might seem a desolate industrial landscape, a wind swept bluff in sight of the Golden Gate Bridge, a giant suspended platform behind a tower mounted billboard, or maybe an expansive cemetery, a figure sporting a proper suit, an animal costume, work clothes, or maybe nothing at all, might read from Pynchon, Lovecraft, George Sterling, or perhaps Danielle Steel!

Midnight walks, urban canoeing, exploring abandoned or unused places, all were part of the Cacophony palate. Anyone could host the basic exploration type event. All that was required was having a favorite route to walk, maybe a passage or two from a favored author, and a quiet, friendly pub or comfortable coffee house to end up at. More elaborate events of this type, like the Secedarean Odyssey, involved dozens of organizers, canoe ingress, massive abandoned infrastructure, zip lines, costumes, security watches, and the like.

The concept of The City as playground was so ingrained into most everyone's event planning schemes that it seemed simple common sense. Substantial portions of industrial San Francisco lay in various stages of abandonment and disuse from the late '70s through the most active years of Cacophony. The structures, bridges, tunnels, urban fields filled with curious detritus and even the more mundane of landscapes were places to explore. Even the occasional rural outing was viewed much as an expedition to a far-away land, crowding the edge of some tattered, salt-soaked treasure map.

Reading a favorite story or poem at some romantic point along the way, or perhaps watching a movie that haunted your dreams before setting out into the real world, was a sure fire way to share what ever crazy monsters or lovely fantasies might be shipwrecked inside your head.

The idea of the world outside made into a playground was catnip for energetic Cacophonists and spawned a variety of games, treasure hunts, races and so on.

The Urban Iditarod began as a Cacophony outing and has since expanded to other cities and other peoples, as has urban golf, SantaCon, Zombie mobs, Brides of March, and other street games and costumed mob attacks. The idea of flash mobs owes a bit of a debt to these earlier outings.

## CACOPHONY FACTOID

### CAPTURE THE DUMMY

THIS URBAN VARIATION ON CAPTURE THE FLAG SUBSTITUTED A LIFE-SIZED MANNEQUIN FOR THE MORE MUNDANE GOAL PRIZE OF A FLAG. OPPOSING TEAMS CORDONED OFF AN AREA OF SAN FRANCISCO'S CHINATOWN, SELECTING BOTH "JAIL" AND "DUMMY" LOCATIONS. AFTER SURVEYING THE DESIGNATED TERRITORY, SETTING THE "DMZ" (DEMILITARIZED ZONE), AND HIDING THE PRIZED DUMMIES, BATTLE ENSUED. TOURISTS, CHINESE SHOP KEEPERS, AND THE AUTHORITIES WERE EQUALLY CONFOUNDED BY THROGS OF CAMO-WEARING PLAYERS CREEPING, CLIMBING AND RACING ALL ABOUT THE DENSE URBAN "MEAN STREETS".

EDVANS

Facing page: Cacophonists organizing street and field games could create detailed instruction sheets and descriptive essays that encouraged certain principles or aesthetics for their adventure. Harry Haller was one organizer in particular that used this technique to enhance the players' experience.

**Enter the Unknown**

Ethyl Ketone

In the fall of 1986 I returned to San Francisco, after four years away, to attend art school. I had lucked into a great living situation in the Inner Richmond through an old friend who was moving to Manhattan. I spent fifteen minutes meeting my soon-to-be new roommate and saying goodbye to my old friend. No deposit, just a handshake, rent at \$250 bucks a month, and my new roommate even offered the formal dining room as a makeshift studio while I was in school. Sweet.

I began to explore my neighborhood, reaching further out to cafes and other venues. As school started, I became absorbed in the experience, but still got off the bus anywhere from two to twelve blocks early in order to observe my neighborhood.

It was during one such bus exit that I noticed a café and entered, thinking a cup of tea would keep me up late enough to get my homework done. As the tea steeped, I perused the flyers by the front door. Finding a calendar interesting enough to read for the 5 minutes left, I picked up *Rough Draft: The Official Organ of the San Francisco Cacophony Society*. OK. Sure. Why Not?

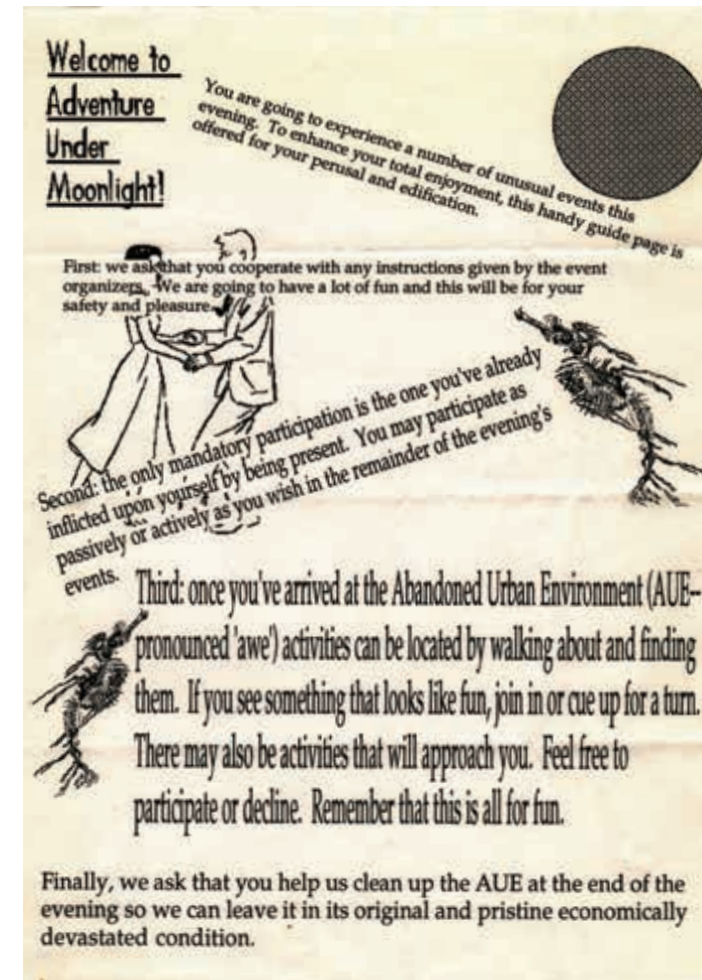
Over the next three months, I stopped in the same café and picked up the calendar. In late 1986 I sent my money in - five bucks - with the message: "Hey Rough, How 'bout a Draft.?" I had subscribed!

I can't be certain how early in 1987 I attended my first event. I just remember I thought about it all week. A

quiet week - sure I had homework - but what else? New friends, yes, but none of any substance as of yet, and this was a big city and here I was, free and able to experience everything! So I perused my latest *Rough Draft*: Friday night the event was an Enter the Unknown hosted by Sebastian Melmoth and Dog Boy.

On Friday I prepared to go out, late. My roommate, who I was realizing had little in common with me, asked me where I was going at 10pm. I explained *Rough Draft* and the Enter the Unknown event write up. The only requirements were to meet at "the baseball diamond at 7th and Lincoln, inside the park. Wear warm dark clothing, bring valid ID." My intent to participate caused a rather large blow up with my new roommate, who read me the riot act about rapists and homeless people and all the other vermin who lived in Golden Gate Park. I countered with my three months of receiving the newsletter and the sound of rationality it offered and my spirit of adventure and ability to take care of myself. She gave up, throwing the TV remote at me as I walked down the stairs to the front door and out into the night.

That event blurs with so many other Enter The Unknowns I attended but I can say, with all certainty, that the Gods were shining on me the day I picked up *Rough Draft* in that café. I found my people and we had years of adventures together. Obviously, I was already a member.



**Roller Skating on the Embarcadero Freeway, 1991**

Marc Weber

Skates hurt my feet. No matter whether they're ice skates, or roller skates, or rollerblades. They pinch the arches in a funny way that makes a deep but piercing ache, like something crucial got folded inside. Also, I'm not a good skater.

Rolling out shakily onto the wide empty pavement that night, between the hands of my girl and our friend, I was focused on my feet and on not falling. But after a wobbly run back and forth with the group along the elevated freeway, I looked around.

It was glorious. The old freeway ran along the water, partly ringing San Francisco from the Bay Bridge to Broadway. Growing up on the Peninsula, it was our royal road to the punk and strip clubs and step-straddled hills of North Beach, a smooth swoop to the left from 101 with the water on one side and downtown buildings looming up over the other; eighty miles an hour, driving through the rooftops of the city as in a dream.

Facing page: Michael Kan, perhaps the closest thing early Cacophony had to a Zelig, and filmmaker and critic Robert Hubbard at the 2nd Atomic Café. This event took place in the sub-basement of an abandoned Federal Government warehouse in San Francisco. Mike was involved with early experimentation in holography. Above: Cacophonist urban explorers inside an undisclosed location somewhere north of San Francisco.



But now the earthquake-damaged freeway was deserted as it waited for destruction, a forbidden moon-drenched high ground floating over the gritty roadway below. My Cacophony friends and housemates had planned a group farewell on skates, rolling across the vacant night lanes in top hats and street clothes and Mardi Gras beads.

We assembled silently and stole up some back way, pausing only to lace on skates and some for a quick hit of drink or smoke. We rolled, we yelled, we smiled. We skated where semis had thundered. In my memory there's a big moon, but maybe that's embellishment.

All too soon, police lights arrived, cars moving blue and red toward us over the empty freeway. They swept us slowly to the exit ramp, and it was time to go home.





### Canoeing Under the Wharves

Marc Weber

Islais Creek is like black shiny oil at the end of the industrial boat ramp. The aluminum canoes gleam dully. We're sorted into groups for each canoe with usual Cacophony solemnity, as if planning a commando raid. Every boat has some experienced person to tell us dogsbodies what to do. Stepping into the canoes is a move fraught with risk for an instant, like trying to balance on the inside of a rolling log. The taut metal skin vibrates under your foot, like a drumhead over water.

Soon we're paddling in the clear night on the creek. My girl Kathleen is next to me. Our pockets are empty of anything an unscheduled swim might ruin. I smell the salt water and enjoy the strange slicing sensation my paddle makes as it moves. The wharves are in view, a black border separating shiny water and sky.

Passing under the low wooden roof, we're suddenly under the wharves. It's silent except for little splashing sounds and occasional breaths and murmurs. Piers rise on every side, marking narrow corridors like supermarket aisles that stretch far ahead beyond our lights. Seaweed grows down the piers and disappears into the bay. As in so many Cacophony events, from the Atomic Cafe to rollerskating on the Embarcadero, the strongest sense is of being somewhere beyond the pale. Not forbidden,

exactly, but where nobody normally realizes you can go. Like finding space within a solid.

The tide is low enough to let us pass comfortably. We have just a small window of time to keep the claustrophobia of this near subterranean space at bay. On the way out we pass a houseboat with yellow interior lights spilling out gently onto the black creek. It's achingly inviting, a warm little home floating in the huge inky night. Then out, and back to talking, and housemates, and noise.



### Canoeing Under the Wharves

*When: Friday, May 3rd and Saturday May 4th*

*Meet: 7:30 pm Lincoln Way at 7th Ave., just inside GG Park at the baseball diamond.*

*We will put in near Hyde St. Pier in Aquatic Park and canoe to the Ferry Building. Part of the trip will be under the wharves.*

*All of it will be a new perspective to you unless you are already an urban canoeist/kayaker. Life vests will be provided.*

*This event will fill up quickly! RSVP asap. Bring: Warm, layered, wool or water resistant clothing. Note: Bulky coats, extremely heavy sweaters, huge boots are NOT GOOD. Layered clothing is recommended.*

*Your hosts: Ethyl Ketone and Sebastian Melmoth*

*—Rough Draft, April, 1991*

## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**NOCTURNAL URBAN CANOEING**

IN THE EARLY 1990s, EAGER TO DELVE INTO THE WATERLOGGED URBAN OUTDOORS, CACOPHONY HOSTED EXPEDITIONS BELOW SAN FRANCISCO'S SOGGY COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PIERS. ARMADAS OF CANOES CRAMMED WITH TEMERARIOUS TRAVELERS DISEMBARKED FROM SITES STRETCHING FROM THE EMBARCADERO TO ISLAIS CREEK. IN SOME OF THE MORE PRECARIOUS LOCATIONS, THE DOCKS AND SUBSTRUCTURES SWARMED WITH VERMIN. A MORE OMINOUS THREAT WERE LARGE CONTAINER VESSELS AND THEIR MONOLITHIC PROPELLERS, CHURNING THE BAY'S WATER INTO AN ANIMATED BIOLUMINESCENT FOAMY SLUDGE.

Facing page: Svensk Runestone piloting a canoe underneath the wharves of San Francisco. Canoeing Under The Wharves was a popular event that enjoyed several revivals over the years.



**Only Skin Deep**

Chris DeMonterrey

We were exploring the Dean's office on the top floor of the Mortuary Sciences Building. It was getting quite crowded and people were going through the printing and documents office, excitedly perusing various papers, shining their flashlights on death or graduation certificates and other mortuary related forms. I believe that someone purloined a couple of death certificates, business cards' and calendars. The complex had been a working mortuary as well as a trade school for nascent morticians. It was sandwiched between a high-rise apartment complex and a large private residence, so we had to try and be quiet so as not to be exposed and have the police called.

It seemed a bit crowded and noisy in the office and I wanted to explore a bit on my own. I went downstairs to the basement through some double doors, planning to more thoroughly explore the morgue, which we had breezed through with the group earlier. I wondered if a body or perhaps other interesting things had been left behind in some dim corner.

I was determined to find out.

Looking around, I saw dark angle iron steel morgue frames for holding cadaver trays going up to the ceiling like human size empty refrigerator racks.

Nothing in the racks.

Then I started shining my flashlight around in various corners and spotted a dark green 5-gallon bucket labeled "embalming fluid."

I grabbed the handle and picked it up and felt that it was heavy with what I expected to be fluid... but it wasn't sloshing liquid.

I put the bucket down in the middle of the morgue floor, so I had plenty of room to get my fingers underneath the lid and pull it up. It popped open with a hollow snap and echo through the room as I put the lid to one side on the floor. I shined my flashlight inside and saw clear heavy polyethylene plastic folded over near the top inside of the bucket.

Holding the light in with my left hand I reached into the bucket with my right hand to find the edges of the plastic, began to pull up the top folds, and opened the polyethylene. With the plastic unfolded, I shined my flashlight to the center of the open plastic and saw a pale surface with a whitish thick edge.

I reached in, grabbed the edge, and pulled up on the material inside and began to pull it out of the bucket. It began to partly unfold from its own weight and I could see two nipples and some light brown hair on a light brown skin.

Inside the lower parts of the bucket were two arm skins with hairy forearms, a torso, two leg skins split down the calf, and two rear-end skins with cut-outs for their anus holes. I never did find another torso skin to match the extra rear end. I called to the others and showed them. "What are you going to do with it?" Jeffrey Spaulding asked.

I ended up taking it home and kept it in my refrigerator. I had to remove the metal grate shelving to fit the bucket in. My roommates, curious about the lack of space for their food in the refrigerator, examined the contents of the bucket while I was out and ended up kicking me out of the apartment later.

I kept the skin in my new place for a year, until the day a couple broke into my apartment and held me up with a machine gun. They did not take the skin. I wasn't sure exactly what to do with it. It was simply too interesting a thing to merely throw away. John Law suggested I give it to Mark Pauline at Survival Research Labs.

Pauline and his crew made it into a piece of display art for a show at Southern Exposure Gallery. They pierced the nipples and tattooed the breast and thighs. Art patrons thought the "piece" looked "realistic."

**Urban Golf**Silke Tudor, *SF Weekly*, May 15, 1996

It's Saturday afternoon and North Beach locals sit drinking vino inside Caffè Trieste. GianFranco Giotta, a Sinatra-like singer with brown-tinted sunglasses and a side-part, belts out a selection of heartfelt love songs, while younger patrons smoke cigarettes on the sidewalk patio outside. I scan the crowd for any hint of loud plaid, since garish clothing is the equivalent of a secret handshake for members of the Urban Golfing League, a branch of the San Francisco Cacophony Society.

Seeing none, I deposit myself at a sidewalk table. A large man in a sweatshirt that reads, "Will I golf for food," momentarily piques my interest until he begins busing tables; meanwhile, a silent guy in a black blazer pulls a chair up next to me and starts studying a textbook on abnormal psychology. Finally, I spy a young, pasty specimen clad in a straw hat, a bright faux-Hawaiian shirt, and a pair of plaid pants that would have done Steve Martin's wild-and-crazy-guy proud. He struts to the cafe door and scans the interior over the rim of his metallic shades. I shamefully indicate my understated plaid skater shorts. With a big smile, "Jonny Bivouak" plops himself down at the table. Mr. Black Blazer suddenly whips out an egg-yolk yellow beret and announces that he is, indeed, one of us.

"You get penalized two strokes for not wearing plaid," "Bivouak" chides. "Mr. Big" and "Miss Appropriation,"

who organized today's street tournament in honor of Urban Golfing founder "Bogey T. Par" who "was hit by a bus while attempting a daring shot," flounce onto the scene. Miss Appropriation, looking smashing in a white crochet outfit and floppy summer hat, passes out rules, maps, and whiffle balls. Two motorcyclists roar onto the scene, golf clubs strapped to the back of their machines, and soon a plaid crazy-quilt of more than a dozen players has assembled, including a serious putter named "Billy Ray Virus."

Much to the bemusement of Trieste customers -- who shake their heads and chuckle good-naturedly -- the competitors carefully select clubs, practice strokes, and critique each other's form. A quick photo-op with the man who will apparently "golf for food" -- but not for fun -- and the League is off and running.

First tee off: The pedestrian island on Columbus and Broadway, on which a square of artificial turf is taped. With each green light, a golfer sends his whiffle ball flying through the intersection and down Columbus, then chases it through oncoming traffic. Bivouak, whose ball lodges in a street median, stands eyeing the first hole (a drain in front of Barberini's Italian Cafe). With the concentration of a true professional, he ignores the stares and shouts of passing automobile owners. After a few practice strokes he swings ... and it's good! After a burst of applause, the group starts toward the next hole -- a grassy knoll in the middle of Portsmouth Square that can only be reached by hitting up the slight incline of Washington.

"We have to golf uphill," whines a virgin urban golfer. "That's just par for the course," comes the seasoned communal response. "Don't be such a 'putts!'" someone shouts, to general groans of disapproval.

In usually tranquil Portsmouth Square, residents regard the spectacle with ill-concealed suspicion and hostility. A tiny old woman in black slippers mutters unintelligible epithets, while a stern mother drags away a gape-mouthed child. But the golfers are oblivious, faced with larger problems, like car-flattened balls and dog-shit traps.

Only "Weevil Shrimpstien," who has been golfing with a tennis racket (the cover wedged firmly over his head) and those lucky few with crushed balls are able to successfully navigate the steep grade of Clay. Other Leaguers, whose pesky balls keep rolling back down, find their strokes shooting up into the 30s.

On Grant, the crew picks up two Virginian tourists who are eager to embrace the wacky San Francisco sporting event despite a severe handicap. After a tolerant beat cop explains that traffic is being jammed in the already

congested streets of Chinatown, the game moves to the even more congested sidewalks of Chinatown. "Drive through!" shouts Mr. Big. "The next hole is in sight."

Outside the Dim Sum House, spectators line up to watch the athletes putt their mangled balls into a grill carefully marked with a white stencil. The bustling foot traffic doesn't miss a beat, shoppers simply flowing around and, in the case of Bivouak (who often uses pool shots), over the game. The driver of a Toyota Land Cruiser shouts, "Five-stroke penalty!" when Bivouak mistakes a Vita Soy carton for his ball.

Confronting a cable car on Stockton, the golfers are faced with -- you guessed it -- a tourist trap, which they deftly avoid by waving their clubs and shouting. An aborted run through the Hotel Triton -- they didn't have any draft beer -- brings the league to the fifth hole at Cafe Claude where the very proper waitrons cheerfully serve frothy pints to the sun-baked crew. After a few nibbles of stolen bread and the addition of two Swiss tourists, the group is off and running. Next stop: Golf and Tennis World, which the gang literally plays through. Like so many Cacophony-inspired events, the fun ends at Union Square.

While tired Cacophonists tally up their scores and plan the evening's requisite boozing, a passage from Mr. Black Blazer's psych book comes to mind: "Periodic societal breakdowns may produce generations characterized by self-centeredness, inability to delay gratification, and a short attention span." Nice to be among friends.



This page: Mallets used during the Urban Croquet Games hosted by Cacophony 2.0. The beer cans were filled with concrete and irony.

S.F. Cacaphony Society Presents:

# Return to the OAKLAND SEWERS

Obscure Walking Tour #4  
\$3.00 A HEAD

Meet in S.F. 7:30 July 14 1990

Main Entrance To Marriott Hotel 55 4th st At Mission

OR in Oakland 8:30

Entrance to Peralta Hacienda Park near the intersection

OF

(Humbolt & Davis)

This event is a formal dress affair, from the waist up.

Waist down, rubber boots, hipwaders, tough pants, etc

We will walk 2 1/4 miles under the streets of Oakland,

ending up in a pastoral city park for a late night

pot luck dinner. Bring food, beer.



Call Ed 759-7663 or Wieder Man 567-7140



## Obsession with the Subterranean Kevin Evans

In the early 1970s, as a young child I was re-located from the serene and picturesque milieu of Pacific Grove California, to the muggy agricultural inland empire located in the central valley, Fresno. For many years during my internment, I'd heard tales of a labyrinth of tunnels spanning a dozen or more acres, a fertile cavernous "Garden of Eden." This secretive territory was located underneath some of the valley's most unyielding hardpan, sculpted in the early years of the 20th century by the hands of a mad Sicilian. The story of this visionary eccentric inspired my obsessive imagination to seek out this and other examples of alternative societies.

1985: I'd recently graduated from high school and spent my summer preparing for my first year in art school in San Francisco. The one free weekend I had, I decided I would escape the valley heat with a cheap movie. The time and cash allotted, I defaulted on what is now considered an adored cult favorite, *The Goonies*. It was a silly kid's film, set in Astoria, Oregon, with the protagonists, a band of adventuresome children seeking pirate's treasure in a booby trapped cavern, terminating at a treasure laden galleon. The film re-ignited my wonder with the unknown spaces below. Perhaps this amusing, recurring emotional scar was the result of pleasing

childhood encounters with The Underground Gardens, Carlsbad Caverns, and Idaho's gigantic pre-historic lava tubes, "Craters of the Moon". As I began my first year in art school, I'd become fast friends with a group of thrill-seeking individuals in the dormitory where I resided. One late night, plotting explorative adventures in the bay area, one suggested the Marin Headlands, an area known to contain miles of abandoned military tunnels, shuttered and haphazardly maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation. This location became our beloved favorite for impromptu picnics, amateur stargazing, and my favorite pursuit, seeking an unlocked aperture to the forgotten underworld. The search in and of itself was immensely satisfying, though never successful. At that point. The lure of the unknown and what might be found was a driving notion to fuel further excursions...

Descent into the underground, achieved!

### Return to the Oakland Sewers

1990: Three years into my "tenure" with the Cacophony Society, I'd heard many tales and exploits, all impressive, entertaining and inspirational musings, of the organization and its predecessor -The San Francisco Suicide Club. One struck at a peculiar, personal itch

## CACOPHONY FACTOID

### SEWER TOURS

THE SUICIDE CLUB EXPLORED MANY BAY AREA STORM DRAINS AND TUNNELS OVER THE YEARS. THIS TRADITION WAS REANIMATED A DECADE LATER BY THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY. PARTICIPATING MORLOCKS CLAD IN HIP WADERS AND FORMAL ATTIRE WERE PACKED INTO CARGO TRUCKS AND INDECOROUSLY CHAUFFEURED TO AN UNDISCLOSED APERTURE IN AN INDUSTRIAL WASTELAND, BEGINNING AN ODYSSEY THROUGH OAKLAND'S DARK, MOIST UNDERBELLY. THE URBAN SPELUNKING CONCLUDED WITH A FORMAL DINNER AND DANCE AT THE MOUTH OF THE DRAINAGE CHANNEL, JUST INSIDE THE IVY-COVERED WALLS OF THE BAY AREA'S PREMIERE WOMAN'S EDUCATIONAL COMPOUND, MILLS COLLEGE.



Facing page: Sewer walk flyer by Kevin Evans and Dog Döo Productions.

the exploration of the Bay Area's forgotten rivers and creeks, now watery subterranean causeways. This endeavor was a forgotten investigation I'd wanted to unearth. With a great deal of prodding, I convinced Cacophonist Sebastian Melmoth to thaw this dark and moist morsel of urban investigation. After a few planning sessions, the date was set -July 14th, 1990. With the assistance of other veterans of this venue, we would fill a rented moving truck with sub-terrestrial explorers, clad in hip-waders and formal attire, and escort them to an undisclosed passageway in Oakland's industrial badlands, to begin an expedition into a waterlogged, mystifying urban substructure. Our uncanny group made our way eastward. Donned in waterproof ornament and acting as amateur anthropologists, we navigated the locality and its submerged detritus. The affair concluded within the borders of Oakland's Mills College in the early morning hours, celebrated with an appropriate formal dinner and dance.

**Return to the Marin Bunker**

1991: Sebastian Melmoth was requesting a few willing co-explorers to re-enter an obscure bunker complex in the Marin Headlands, once explored by members of the Suicide Club. This was not an officially sanctioned event of the Cacophony Society, more of an "exploratory junket." The solicitation occurred almost spontaneously


around the kitchen table at 1907 Golden Gate (a Cacophony haunt). Myself, and two other Cacophonist were instantly on board for the impromptu escapade. I animatedly reveled in the thought that I could finally fulfill this longing to delve into the potted caverns of Marin...

**The Descent, Down the Rabbit's Hole!**

I'd not expected the entrance to this unknown cavern to be so obvious. Tourist milled about the peak of the abandoned military installation, unaware of our search for the entrance—they were busy capturing family photos with a diminutive San Francisco as a backdrop. Melmoth was inconspicuously stomping at random patches of shrubbery, searching for something hidden in the soil. Within a few minutes the ground flexed beneath his feet, the gateway was found! When uncovered, the aperture resembled something a large rodent might dwell within, something a few starving artists and their guide might fit into. We had to make our entrance into the unknown rapid and without notice. On our backs we quickly skidded into the unknown, not knowing the perilous danger lurking inches away, when finally it revealed itself, a 75-80 foot drop into the abyss. A truncated telephone pole lodged into a ladder cage prevented access. We had to climb over it, suppressing extreme acrophobia. Once we had passed the obstruction, it was a 45 or so foot descent down a precarious rusted ladder with a

mid-point deteriorating concrete ledge. The rest of the journey, another 35 feet downwards, was easier, due to the lack of crumbled detritus. As we exited the descent chamber, the underground compound opened, exposing larger halls that once housed ammunition, offices, and an underground road once used for cargo trucks. Overwhelmed with what I was experiencing, I audibly expressed a desire to permanently occupy the space.

This would not be the last exploratory excursion to the mysterious and fascinating location, another "Zone."

This subterranean obsession would continue with "Decent into Necropolis" —a midnight literary walking tour of the Mountain View Cemetery and its dank storm drains, as well as numerous revisitations to the East Bay's labyrinthine storm drains and the elusive Marin bunker wonderland... 



**F. Sunday, June 16, 2:00 PM**  
**(Rain Date: June 30)**  
**Storm Drain Promenade & Sewer Tour D'Elegance**  
 Formal wear and rubber boots are de rigeur for this signature social event of the haute lowlife. Join underground bon vivants Sebastian Melmoth (esq.) and Hamilton Beach (vsop.) for an elegant excursion into the bowels of the East Bay. The walk will include a brief but delightful literary salon under a charming storm drain — those interested in reading aloud should bring a short selection (two pages or less) that seems appropriate for the environs.  
**Meet:** 2 PM at Rockridge BART station, top of eastern most parking lot. *(If you are late, you will be left behind!!)*  
**Bring:** (1) Formal wear & rubber boots or waders, (2) a working flashlight with fresh batteries, (3) something to drink on the trail, (4) \$\$ for BART & refreshments afterward.  
**Info:** Melmoth ( ) OLD-POOP)

Above: Descent into the underworld. Facing page above: Yahoos Doorstop cheers on the well-dressed sewer walkers. Facing page below: Some walkers stuck to the mid stream, others would walk with their feet up the sides of the round tunnels, in a largely unsuccessful effort to avoid wet feet.

**Where do I begin telling the story of the "ATOMIC CAFE"?**  
 Gregory Pat Scandalis

First off, it was absolutely the weirdest party that I have every been to or played at.

We didn't know much about the gig: they told us that they would come to Free Band Headquarters and take us to it. This guy shows up with an enormous rented moving van. First we got a lecture. We would go into an abandoned building in the city in the back of the enclosed truck box, and we would not know where this building is. We would enter the building illegally, then down into the building's bomb shelter.

They said they had done this type of thing many times and encountered the police only twice in fifteen years. Once, in 1979, they entered an abandoned 1930s skyscraper in formal wear (tuxes, gowns, white gloves) and proceeded to have a VERY FORMAL dinner on one of the upper floors. Someone wandered out of the area that they had certified as alarm free and set off an alarm. Well, the police showed up and found 42 very proper people in dinner wear, dining in this mess of a sky scraper. Again no one was arrested, and they were asked to leave. The point of this lecture was to warn anyone with a warrant (unpaid tickets) that it would probably be best to not go.

The rules of the party were bring your roller skates and nonperishable bomb shelter food, and once the doors

close at 9 pm, the war will begin. No one can go out until midnight, "when the war is over."

Well, we get in the back of the truck, and the guy tells us that our radio rendezvous is at eight sharp! He also tells us that when he bangs on the truck three times, we must be perfectly quiet. This is the moment we will be entering the building. When finally the truck stops, I figure we must be inside. The back doors open, and we jump out into a very dark loading dock. There's a concrete stairway leading down, illuminated by lots of candles on the steps.

We unload the band gear and work our way down to the sub-basement/bomb shelter. There are candles all over so that we can see our way through the building. We are in a very large underground chamber, in what was once a government building, according to one of the organizers. We can see long vaulting hallways, the kind that you would drive a forklift in; there are lots of side passages, and off in the distance two doors are open with light and music pouring out.


When we get to the room, it's pretty surreal. It's evidently an old Civil Defense bomb shelter, quite large, about the length of a gym, but half the width. The Cacophony people have been coming in here for days to decorate. They placed a generator in a room in the corner, and



**CACOPHONY FACTOID**

**THE ATOMIC CAFE**

STARTED IN THE LATE 1980s, THIS ANNUAL NIHILISTIC CELEBRATION OF A POST-APOCALYPTIC SOCIETY, INSPIRED BY THE FILMS "A BOY AND HIS DOG" AND THE "MAD MAX TRILOGY," WAS HELD THREE TIMES IN DIFFERENT ABANDONED LOCATIONS. THE FIRST WAS IN A DECAYING SAN FRANCISCO PRESIDIO BUNKER. THE SECOND OCCURRED IN THE BOWELS OF A HUGE GOVERNMENT WAREHOUSE USED TO STORE PROSTHETIC LIMBS FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS. THE THIRD WAS IN THE SUB BASEMENTS OF A MASSIVE DERELICT TOOTHPASTE FACTORY IN BERKELEY. ENTERTAINMENT WAS PROVIDED BY THE HAIGHT ASHBURY FREE BAND, AND A NONPERISHABLE BOMB SHELTER STYLE POTLUCK WAS SUPPLIED FOR THE FESTIVITIES.



EVANS

Facing page: Various images from the first Atomic Café. This event took place in Spanish American War bunkers within three hundred yards of the Golden Gate Bridge police headquarters.

**Fools for industry** The Cacophony folks just don't stop — their newest "adventure" will take place in the bowels of a scenic steel factory in West Oakland. Guided by a distant steel pipe symphony, the group will tromp through a labyrinth of piano graveyards, weird sculptures and paintings, ending up in a wide open space. From there on in, some of the activities will include a clown performance, a pot luck dinner and the jazzy sounds of Free Band. Bring a costume, clown nose, food to share, etc. Sat, April 20, 7:30 pm. **Amtrak station parking lot, 16th & Wood, West Oakland,**

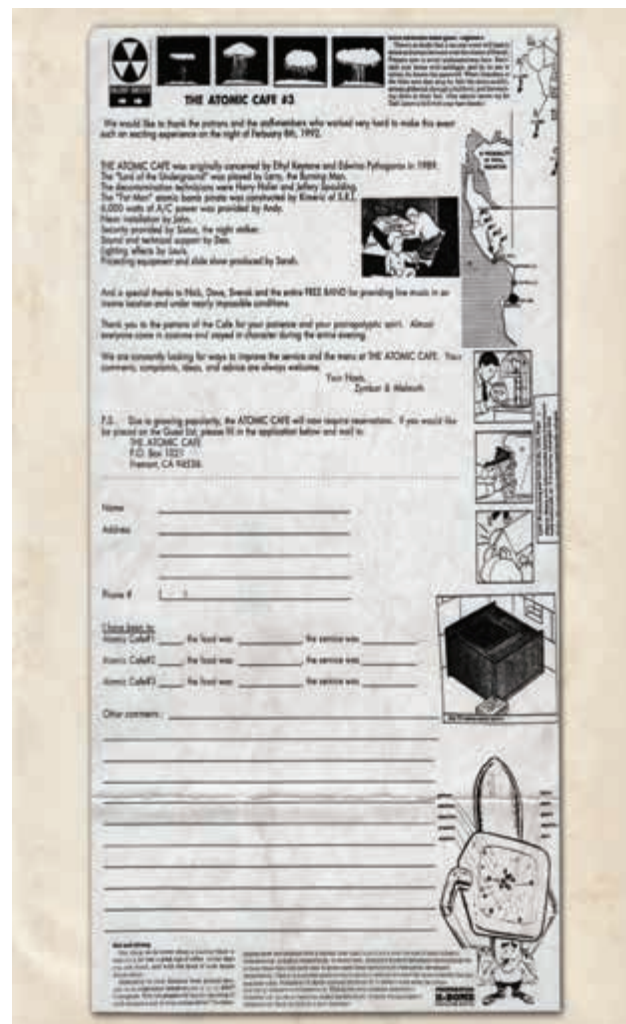
rigged a very clever ducting system to port the exhaust up several floors and outside through a window. The room was dimly lit. They set up a 5 foot stage at the end of the room for us to play on. There are piles of prosthetic legs and arms hanging from the ceiling, also radio-active

hazard signs, and "Warning Land Mines" signs. At the end of the room opposite the stage there's a table with old army rations and lots of 5 gallon bottles of water that are bubbling with dry ice.

As we set up, the Cacophony people go to the bar several blocks away with their giant truck to bring the "guests." We've rented a fog machine and a bubble machine for the evening (to give the band that post nuclear Lawrence Welk look). We are in white Toxic Waste suits that we got for a gig that some Japanese magazine wrote about.

We hear the truck roll up; we fire up the band. We play a funk version of "Freedom Jazz Dance," sounding like the David Bowie song "Fame." The guests go through "decontamination" before they enter the shelter. People start to drift in, one at a time. By the time everybody was "decontaminated" and the doors were shut, there were over 100 people in the shelter!

The party was pretty weird; people in radiation suits were roller skating to the music. Peter the Hippie was go-go dancing. Everyone looked like extras from *Road Warrior*. Midnight came and they loaded all the guests back in the truck and whisked them into the night. We tore down the band, reloaded the gear, cleaned up the room (leaving no evidence that we had been there), blacked out all the candles, and slipped quietly away.



This and facing page: Images and propaganda from the third Atomic Café, which took place in a mammoth abandoned toothpaste factory in Berkeley.



**First seen in Summer Burkes' "Dilettante"**  
*San Francisco Bay Guardian*, March 7th, 2001

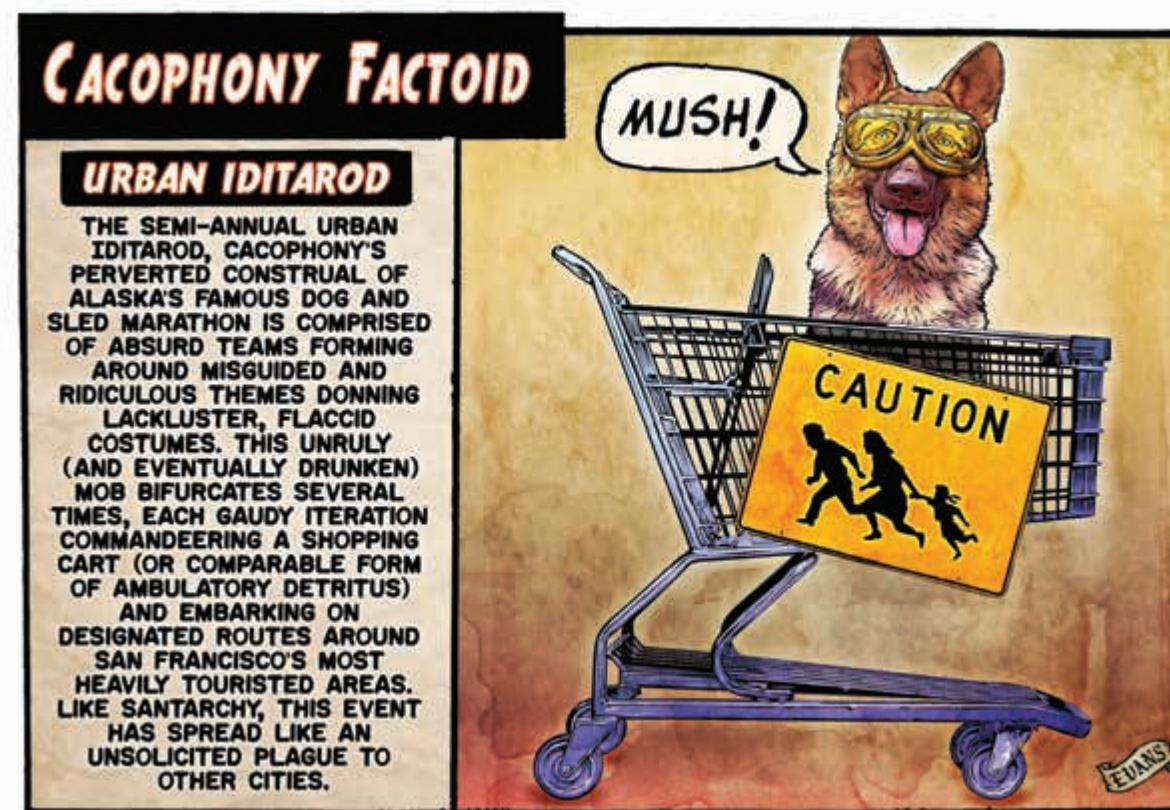
Saturday morning, in a small alley near Fifth and Howard Streets downtown, participants pin socks to baseball and ski caps (ears), smear eyeliner on their faces (snouts and whiskers), decorate shopping carts (sleds), and drink beers (just because) in preparation for the '7th Annual Urban Iditarod.' Held on the same day that those trained malamutes and huskies drag people around the Alaskan tundra for prize money, the Urban Iditarod is San Francisco's usual wacky adult-child answer to a mainstream media circus.

As event organizers alternately oversee the proceedings and pause to share flasks, dogs in various states of array and disarray fuel up and put finishing touches on carts and costumes. Team members from *Raiders of the Lost Bark* dip into a golden cooler with golden figurines on top -- the Bark of the Covenant, one assumes -- and lap up pre-Iditarod drinks from dog bowls. Teams like the *Blue Dogs*, the S-M-themed *Ugly Bitches*, the *McGruff Crime Dogs*, and for some reason the *Pirates of the Ice* (complete with giant Jolly Roger flag) fraternize and hurl empty threats. The *Holy Terriers*, an all-female team dressed as slutty nuns (plus one in an enviable Elvis jumpsuit), make their presence known with a round of yappy barking; most other dogs join in. A few pups sniff around others' backsides, and a rolled-up newspaper is loudly wished

for. Saturday shoppers pulling into the entrance of the alley's parking garage point and laugh and rubberneck. The Baha Men's "Who Let the Dogs Out" begins to blare from one team's boom box. A car alarm sounds, and everyone on the street howls.

After the course map is distributed (3.5 miles!) and a few ground rules are established, the race is on. Contestants cease milling and collectively sprint through the alley and toward downtown, barking and screaming. They run fast and my platform-booted companion and I, endeavoring to follow along, immediately begin to question our cardiovascular health and finally pause to consult the map for the location of the first mandatory rest stop. The Iditarod tears through the cable car turnaround and Union Square, and though we think we've headed them off at the pass, when we get to the Irish Bank, the dogs are already there, drinking. A passel of festooned shopping carts sits scrunched together as the dogs catch their breath and buy booze.

One beer later, the mob moves in the direction of Chinatown, overtaking traffic on Grant Street and running uphill with alarming dexterity and speed. My companion and I power-walk but trail behind again, concisely explaining the event to addled bystanders over our shoulders, and eventually shortcut it to rest stop number



Facing page: A very enthusiastic team prepares for the Urban Iditarod. This same team was considerably less perky after several courses and dozens of beverages.

two. Inside Red's Place, a patent-leather-corseted dog-minatrix poses for a photo with an ancient and jolly bar patron, and the runoff from the small bar congregates in the adjoining alley. ThoughtPolice.com's minister of propaganda scales a fire escape and photographs the throng as an old woman pokes her head out and watches from the window he's standing in front of. Before the Iditarod heads out again, this time for Washington Square, my companion and I get a head start in order to see the procession running up the hill. (Note: It's far more uncomfortable to walk around dressed as a dog when one is without one's pack.)

As we perch at Vallejo and Grant, the rowdy crowd rounds the corner four blocks below, still going uphill and still apace, and heads past us to the square. The Wig Dogs glow and pant in neon coiffures; a man dressed as a giant bone made from cardboard and duct tape steers a sled as three women drag it uphill, ropes tied from their waists to the sled's end. The Holy Terriers lag behind, sassily shaking their tails and purposefully holding up traffic. In Washington Square, Urban Iditarod dogs play with real dogs and roll on their backs in the grass. A band of Christian evangelists, with a guitar, fiddle, and a loud PA. system, is targeted by the Holy Terriers ("Look! The nun-dogs are talking to the God people!") and asked to announce that a six-legged race will begin shortly. The Terriers bound back to the group, proudly displaying their new "God brochures." The Ugly Bitches build a human pyramid, and on the other side of the park two dozen people collapse and jump into a dog pile.

Teams compete in dog-bowl races -- a tag-team battle

where contestants crawl to dishes to lap beer -- and then, well-lubricated and still barking, the Iditarod pushes off toward Fisherman's Wharf. My companion and I, shamefully, take the 45 bus. ("My dogs are barkin'!" she jokes. Haw haw.) Though we even skip a watering hole and everything, we still arrive to the Steelhead Brewery to find all the sleds parked out front and tourists filming the chaos from all angles. Dogs perform theatrics and drink drinks both bagged and bought; inside the somewhat-fancy eatery, Iditarod contestants are shuffled to the back of the room.

After downing \$2 pints, issuing more empty threats, and barking at unsuspecting diners, the Iditarod heads back out en masse along the water to the Fort Mason Center. My companion and I, now somehow left in charge of escorting ThoughtPolice's weighty and cumbersome security guard (a waist-up mannequin with a police uniform), have lost all hope of keeping up. On the foggy banks of Fort Mason beside the chilly Bay, all opposing dog packs huddle together for warmth, and a Brit dog with a spiked collar announces the winners of various prizes. A park police officer pulls up, quizzically observing the affair and calmly calling for backup, and several Terriers and Bitches skip down the hill to dance around him and pose for photos. Iditarod participants, costumes deteriorating and eyeliner-covered noses now half smeared off, still flip, drink, cavort, careen, and bay. Though hours after the event's start, the pack doesn't seem to be losing any steam, we nevertheless catch the bus home, tails between our legs, and crawl back underneath the porch.



Above: An early pre-stumbling stage of the Iditarod. Facing page: Pier 70, at the end of 20th Street on the Bay. This massive ship-to-shore warehouse was used for many underground events, photo and video shoots, and urban exploration trainings over the many years. Harry Haller's ambitious Seacedearean Odyssey and Survival Research Labs, 1994 Doom show were two of the most elaborate.

**Fake Events**

One longstanding tradition in Cacophony was the fake event write-up. This exercise in creative writing proved to be irresistible to certain newsletter editors when faced with a blank spot needing text in their upcoming issue of *Rough Draft*. Many would read the new month's RD with great anticipation; of course some of the actual events and the real activities planned and advertised in Cacophony's public organ were so bizarre that you could read most of the way through a fake event write-up before you realized it was a joke.

Fake handbills and public messages were delivered along with the *Rough Drafts*, ready for duplication at the local copy shop and subsequent posting on telephone poles and construction walls around town. And, oddly enough, the occasional "fake event" listed in *Rough Draft* was more believable than some of the actual events planned and implemented.

**Swim The Farallones!**

*When: Thursday, September 1, Midnight*  
*Where: Ocean Beach*  
*Bring: Bathing suit and towel*  
*That's right! A delightful, refreshing, enervating, midnight twenty-four mile round trip dip in the Pacific Ocean! Imagine yourself dodging sharks, man-o-wars, drunken fishermen, dope smugglers, the Coast Guard, and the US Navy! And once you arrive at the famous Farallone Islands, home of the largest guano factory in the world, you get to turn around and SWIM BACK!*  
*A swell event for the whole family!*  
*Your hosts: Stan and Ollie*

— *Rough Draft*, September, 1988

**Duct Those Suckers!**

*When: Monday, January 1st, 8:00pm*  
*Meet: Naked Eye Video, Haight St.*  
*Let's shake a leg on those New Years resolutions, and set to work cleaning up the Haight! There are too many foul-mouthed abusive thugs running around, cluttering up the sidewalks. While they may not be responsible for their actions, of their manners, due to insufficient breast feeding, they still pose a danger to the community.*  
*So... march with us up Haight Street, in the safety of a New Vigilance campaign. Help secure those unsightly, self-destructive youth from doing any further damage to themselves or each other. Bring cheese for the rats, wigs for the skinheads, rolls of duct tape and ping pong balls to gag those profane noise makers of the night.*  
*Your hosts: Pike Bishop and Catcall Hellbreath*  
 — *Rough Draft*, January, 1990

**Eat The Dead**

*When: Sunday, August 9th, 8:00pm*  
*Meet: Trad'r Sam's on Geary between 25th and 26th Avenues.*  
*Surprisingly, society's greatest taboo is only a misdemeanor under the law, and we aren't talking about picking your nose. We have obtained a variety of healthy, discarded human body parts from SF General Hospital and will use them in a feast fit for a cannibal king! We can almost guarantee this will be a once-in-a-lifetime gourmet eating opportunity, and a unique chance to confront, and master, your deepest inhibitions.*  
*Bring: An exotic condiment or delicious dessert for at least ten. I'll be the one wearing the necklace of rat skulls.*  
 — *Rough Draft*, August, 1987



**BARK Desert Column**

BARK had been meeting for trips to local shooting ranges and quietly buying up antique and completely out-dated ordnance for a few years before joining SF Cacophony in the Black Rock Desert. At that time there existed a gun shop on 2nd Street, just south of Market, called the San Francisco Gun Exchange. I bought my first bolt-action rifle, a 1913 Mark III Enfield at the Exchange. Ammo was still being made at the many armament factories in Yugoslavia and was always plentiful.

Labor Day was fast approaching and BARK began planning our camp out in the desert. True to form, given that this was a desert mission, khaki and white were *de rigueur*. I searched high and low and found, at a garage sale in my Richmond district neighborhood, a Pith helmet, which turned out to fit me perfectly and had the added bonus of being Belgian. We were the Colonials, going to the deepest desert to explore after all.



Above: Kevin Evans sporting three Mark III Enfield rifles in the Black Rock Desert. Below from left: Erik Chipchase, Corey Keller, Carrie Galbraith, and Fred Verduin training for BARK desert deployment at the Circle S range in Petaluma, California.

Ammo, while plentiful at the Exchange, was pricey, so we ended up in South San Francisco at a gun shop that sold remaindered ammo from the third world. We found 303 issue that was old Iraqi stock. We bought enough to load our bandoliers many times over and proceeded to plan the rest of our gear.

I carefully packed our dishes and other kitchen items: my grandmother's 1918 wedding china, my parents' 1946 silver tea and coffee service and silver flatware, and bright white linen tablecloths and napkins for the entire stay. Oh, and the skirts, parasols, and formal wear for the final night.

We arrived and set up camp, first hoisting the Imperial Russian Flag. A tripod was built and we leaned our various ordnance against it when not in use. Large umbrellas and tables with comfy rattan seating created a drawing room and invited the passing visitor to our camp. Every day we held an informal tea at 4pm, serving said refreshment hot and allowing for the lump sugar to melt deliciously in our guests' cups.

For diversion we created a shooting range in the hills on the edge of the playa. Many of the visitors came and enjoyed the experience of shooting a bolt-action rifle, with the unfortunate few experiencing the not-so-enjoyable experience of shooting out-of-date ammo. No accidents

were had, as everything was carefully monitored, but there were plenty of misfires.

Included in our diversions was the very proper game of polo, played on mountain bikes and using croquet mallets for polo sticks. I remember going for a lovely bike ride with my parasol, thinking that if I rode 20 minutes away and lost sight of the camp, I might never find my way back.

The final night, before the burn, found the entire camp in formal wear, enjoying cocktails around the sunset, waiting to light the Man, with my companions in full dress uniform, of course. Suddenly, a sword fight broke out and everyone cleared the area to allow the two elegantly dressed military men to solve their differences. Rumor began to spread and soon everyone was whispering about the "honor of a woman" or perhaps the "perceived outcome of a battle." Finally hands were shook and we all turned our attention to the main event of the night.

We proudly flew our Russian flag the next morning as we sailed across the playa and back to the blacktop of the modern world. Pith helmet still on my head and desert dust disguising the khaki of my skirt, I knew BARK would find other places and adventures on the outskirts of Cacophony.



## CACOPHONY FACTOID

**BOLT ACTION RIFLE KLUB**

**THE BOLT ACTION RIFLE KLUB (BARK) WAS AN EXPLOSIVE ARM OF THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY FOUNDED BY LEJON ASTRAY AND ETHYL KETONE IN 1989. THIS COVEN OF ANTIQUE ORDNANCE AND ARTILLERY AFICIONADOS ROUTINELY SPONSORED JAUNTY JUNKETS TO THE CIRCLE S RANCH OUTDOOR SHOOTING RANGE IN PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA. MANY MEMBERS MADE A HABIT OF ADORNING THEMSELVES WITH OBSCURE VINTAGE MILITARY UNIFORMS TO MATCH THE AESTHETIC OF THEIR COVETED BOMBASTIC RELICS. BARK WOULD ACCOMPANY THE CACOPHONY SOCIETY TO THE BLACK ROCK DESERT FOR ZONE TRIP #4, AND OTHER EVENTS HELD IN THAT INHOSPITABLE LOCATION. BARK LOGO: ERIK CHIPCHASE**



**Elmer Fudd 12 Gauge Pro-Am**

*When: March 16th*

Join us for an afternoon of fun, frolic, and jackassery. Don your favorite gun slinger costume and head down to the south bay for a sporting clay potluck. (Gun sharing available-no experience necessary.) Ten stations (just like golf), ten shots per. Bring vittles to share and home brew if a brewer ya be, arrgh. This is a costume event, except for you, Peter. Gunplay costume cavalcade includes notables such as Jed Clampet, Ma Barker, Kaiser Wilhelm, Claudine Longet, Lee Harvey, Pancho Villa, Marlin Perkins on a spree... suit your self. You hosts: Rusty Cleaver, Dennis, and your close personal friend, Dr. Anderson.

—Rough Draft, March, 1996

**Suburbs to Nowhere**

*When: Sunday, August 20th, 12 noon*

Meet: Rendezvous at Cafe Soma. We will carpool and compare ideas before entering suburbia.

Tucked among the north peninsula locales is a housing development that never was—a ghost of a suburb. All roads, street lights, and signs are intact, but not a house. Join me as we create our own version of suburban life (sick, twisted, or depressing as it might be). In the spirit of the Exquisite Novella, I'd like to create a "photo novella." In an afternoon of picnicking and improvisation, each person will come away with an outrageous little booklet by the end of the day.

Bring: 1) Money for film, processing and xeroxing, 2) costumes and small props for your suburban persona. Call me if you have ideas to set the scene. 3) a picnic potluck to share.

Your host: Amy

—Rough Draft, August, 1995

**Lost Boys and Girls Go Camping**

*When: Saturday, August 1st*

*Where: Marin*

The raging flames of Duraflame logs call invitingly for you to scream, run wild like a maniac, or to sit quietly and enjoy the beauty of the Marin Headlands. We will be camping in a secluded tree-lined glade at the edge of reality. Games of tag, Hide n' Seek and Capture the Flag will be organized for those who want to get grubby, and shade will be available for those who wish to relax away from the grown-up world. A guided tour of the bunkers and other surprises are in the works. There is no site fee, but you will need to provide your own food, beverages, and camping gear for the day/night. Transportation, bathroom facilities, and limited tent space are available for those in need.

You hosts: Monkey Master and Yagoon Doorstop.

Limited attendance.

—Rough Draft, August, 1992



**Costumed Parties**

Catherine Baker was having her 30th birthday and felt compelled to celebrate it with style. "Well," she thought, "where would be the most amazing place to have my birthday party? Of course—the Golden Gate Bridge!" The Annual Golden Gate Bridge Dinner taking place on the pedestrian walkway at the Marin Tower was the second longest running annual event. Started in the first month of the Suicide Club in 1977, this event was a perfect example of the open encouragement Cacophony and the Suicide Club before engendered for anyone coming up with an idea for an event and the collective support marshaled for that idea. Formal dress was encouraged, and with Catherine's simple, elegant construct, a history of three decades worth of costumed and or formal events in unusual and thoroughly atypical locations was launched. The Bridge Dinner took place each year on or around Catherine's day, until the Bridge Police finally shut it down in the late '90s. The largest affair was in 1982, when over 200 resplendent parties arrived, some in limos, at the North lot and conga lined out to the tower.

Cacophony hosted many formal dress sewer walks. Yagoon Doorstop and others organized costume ball waltzes in cemeteries, urban parks, and monuments. People dressed elegantly in all white dined on white foods while reclining amidst the whitewashed walls of underground military bunkers.

Formal attire dances in laundromats were an excellent way to while away the time as your doilies and work clothes spun through the washing/drying cycles.

"If you're not properly dressed, it's not a proper party" as P Segal said. Even if the party is in a sewer!

**Greek Drag Costume Workshop for "Body of Urban Myth"**

*When: Sunday, November 16th, 1-5 pm*

*Where: Alabama at 19th Streets*

Greek Drag: hmmm... togas out of children's bed sheets, leopard print, space-age metallics? Laurel wreaths of used rubber, kitchen utensils, old x-mas decorations? Bring your self, some ideas, and whatever materials and tools you have laying around (or can scrounge up) and we'll put together some outrageous costumes and props!

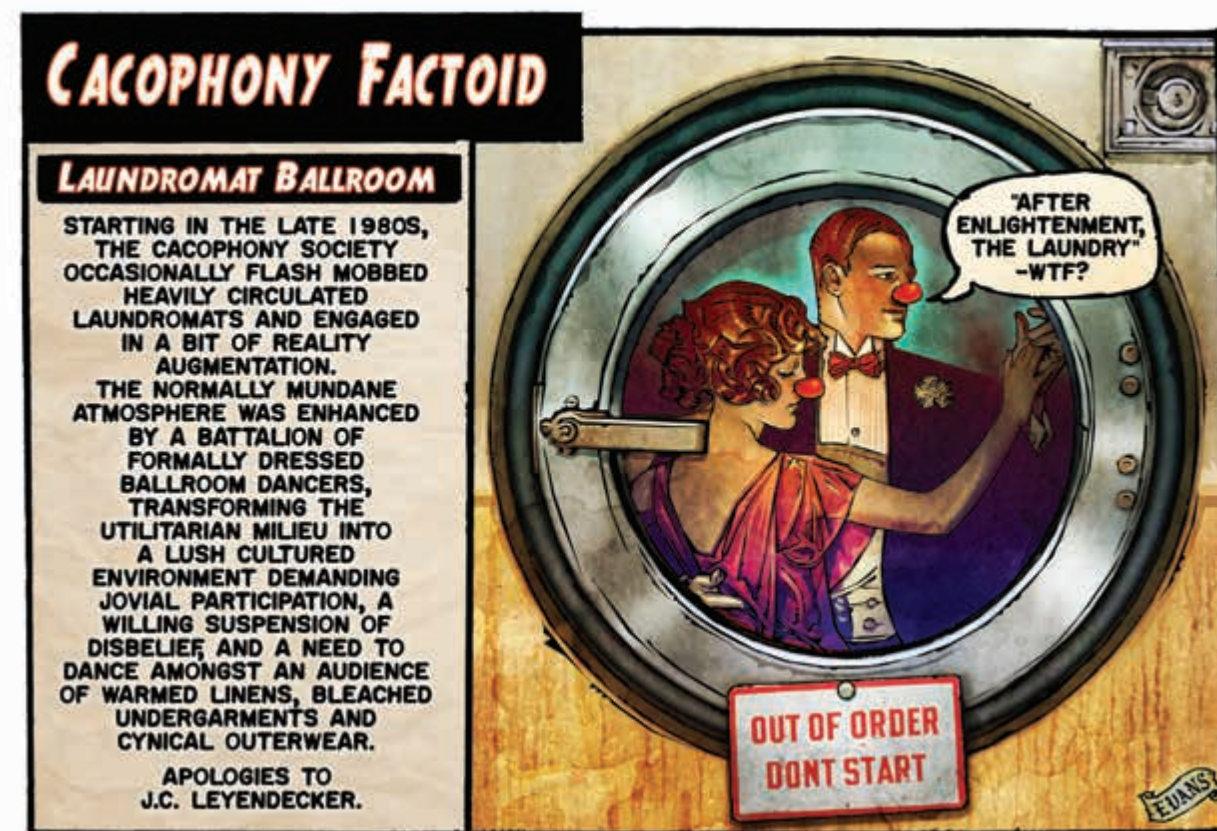
—Rough Draft, November, 1997

**Marzenfest**

*When: March 21st, Vernal Equinox*

High in the lush oak forests above Lamorinda. Faux-teutonic open-air pagan biergarten excess. Homebrewed beer, absurd costumes, extreme potluck, cloven hooves, x-country croquet, foot-stomping accordion jam. Coarse language, adult situations. Giant PVC alpine horn courtesy of Riccola.

—Rough Draft, February, 1998



Facing page: Thomas Burchfield and Lance Alexander pose with Manny, the first Cacophony Dog Head, in front of Don Herron's writing retreat. Herron and his wife, sci-fi fanzine figure Jeannie Bowman, hosted several events at their We-Be-Dudes Ranch. Following pages: Place settings for White Christmas at John Wickett's Museum of Exotica. A typical Cacophony costumed soiree in Golden Gate Park. Louise Jarmilowicz on the left.

### White Christmas

P Segal

Cacophony loved taking old, tired concepts and putting a fresh tweak on them. The holiday season, which in our lifetimes had devolved into an orgy of consumerism, was ripe for improvements. Santa-themed events cropped up early in Cacophony's history, ultimately leading to the national phenomenon of SantaCon.

In the early '90s, there was some nostalgic talk among members of the quiet whiteness of the holiday season in colder climates. Carrie Galbraith and Jeffrey Spaulding proposed that we Californians should get a taste of White Christmas-in a way that people in Minnesota would never get to experience, without severe danger of frostbite, and a team combed the city for the perfect site to host it.

Like so many other Cacophony events, this one took considerable preparation. Days in advance, crews decided to hold the event in a WWII bunker at Fort Funston. To get beyond the concrete barrier that blocked the entrance, they got out of the truck, lifted the bulky impediment, and carted it to the side, so they could drive undeterred into the fort. Armed with buckets of paint and other tools, they chose a room in the interior and rendered the concrete walls luminously bright white.

The night of White Christmas began with the set-up. The advance crew brought tables, folding chairs,

silverware, and glasses, as well as tablecloths, napkins, candles, flowers, and plates-all white. A long dining table stretched the length of the bunker, and was set in formal banquet style.

At the appointed hour, the guests began to arrive with offerings for dinner: fettuccine Alfredo, hard-boiled eggs, cauliflower, jicama, and other dishes, in the full spectrum of whites. The liturgical, polyphonic compositions of Hildegard of Bingen, a 12-century sainted nun, echoed through the fort from a battery-operated book box.

As instructed, everyone showed up in white clothing, shoes, and fashion accessories. The crowd that usually picked red varietals drank that other kind of wine. A fair amount of wine was in order, in a concrete bunker at the beach in late December, with temperatures in the high 40s. With the wind chill factor blasting off the ocean, it felt like it was close to freezing, until you got inside.

As predicted, White Christmas was magical, one of those events worth repeating. The following year, after the annual wakes for Marcel Proust found a perfect home in the John Wickett Museum of Exotica, the place suggested an antithetical venue for a very different version of White Christmas.



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO COSTUMING FOR CACOPHONY EVENTS

Come on and dress me, dress me, dress me, in my finest array,  
 'Cause just in case you haven't heard, today is do mi do day.  
 Dress me in my silver garters, dress me in my diamond studs,  
 'Cause I'm going, do mi doing, in my do mi do duds.  
 I want my undulating undies with the maribou trills.  
 I want my beautiful bolero with the porcupine quills.  
 I want my purple, nylon girdle with the orange blossom buds,  
 Because I'm going, do mi doing, in my do mi do duds.  
 Come on and dress me, dress me, dress me in my peekaboo blouse,  
 With the lovely interlining made of Chesapeake mouse.  
 I want my polka-dotted dickey with the crinoline fringe,  
 For I'm going, do mi doing, on a do mi do binge.  
 I want my lavender spats and in addition to them,  
 I want my honey-colored gusset with the herringbone hem.  
 I want my softest little jacket made of watermelon suede,  
 And my long, persimmon placket with the platinum braid.  
 I want my leg of mutton sleeves and in addition to those,  
 I want my cutie, chamois booties with the leopard skin bows.  
 I want my pink, brocaded bodice with the fluffy, fuzzy ruffs,  
 And my gorgeous, bright blue bloomers with the monkey feather cuffs.  
 I want my organdy snood, and in addition to that,  
 I want my chiffon mother hubbard lined with Hudson Bay rat.  
 Dress me up from top to bottom, dress me up from tip to toe.  
 Dress me up in silk and spinach, for today is do mi do,  
 Do mi do day, do mi do day!  
 So come on and dress me in the blossoms of a million pink trees.  
 Come on and dress me up in liverwurst and camembert cheese.  
 Come on and dress me up in pretzels and dress me up in bock beer suds!  
 'Cause I'm going, do mi doing, in my do mi do duds!



-Five Thousand Fingers of Doctor T

While large portions of our society are wearing plastic jogging suits, baseball caps turned backward and neon belly bags, members of the Cacophony Society often find new and creative ways to dress.

There are few events where costuming is mandatory, most events are made more enjoyable by the addition of some unusual, external garb. The sight of fifteen clowns getting on a Muni Bus or twenty gorillas visiting the Zoo can be a very memorable experience for both participants and the unsuspecting public.

If you are someone who has never "dressed up", the idea may be intimidating, unpleasant, alien or simply, unnecessary. However, if you continue to come to events and note the numbers of people who do come in some sort of costume, you may eventually feel that you'd like to try wearing a set of clothes which departs from anything which currently exists in your closet.

This information sheet is written to help explain how to acquire some new additions to your current wardrobe. The first and easiest step is to look into your closet and decide if there is anything which could be modified to look like something other than what it currently is. If you have an item of clothing which you don't mind sacrificing, you can, with a few rips and other disfigurements, turn it into something appropriate for the next Atomic Cafe (where everything is supposed to look damaged and radiation-scarred). Keep in mind that many events may present special obstacles to you and your costume. Besides simple hazards like someone spilling champagne on your white sports coat or stepping on your ruby red slippers, some activities like climbing a fence while wearing a hoop skirt or wading through knee-deep water in a tuxedo with tails can be challenging. The event description in the newsletter will generally provide you with specific information about activities and any costume themes which will enhance the event.

You can often mix together unlikely items of clothing, for example, a nightshirt and a tuxedo jacket (if you have one). Some combinations could be just right for an event such as the St. Stupid's Day Parade. If you hold onto your clothes long enough, they will eventually not look like "normal" clothes. For example, if you lived through the 60's, your regular clothes from that time might look like costume now, especially if you wore a lot of hippie clothing. Disco clothing from the 70's might be just the thing for a Polyester Party. Don't overlook what is closest to home.



## An Encouragement to Future Pranksters

Charlie Todd, Founder, Improv Everywhere

I moved to New York in the summer of 2001 with my undergraduate degree in theatre and not much else. The plan was to figure out a way to make it as an actor or maybe a theatre director. I signed up as a temp, which was what was in fashion for actors those days. I worked at crappy cube farms during the day answering phones, and spent my evenings getting to know the off-off-broadway theatre scene that a few of my friends were involved in. It was a bit depressing. My super talented friends were working their asses off on a production that had poor timeslots in an un-air conditioned theatre in the middle of July. Crowds were sparse.

One night I made the spontaneous decision to attempt to fool a West Village bar into thinking I was musician Ben Folds, with the help of an accomplice who entered separately, and loudly identified me. It worked. For three hours I posed for photos, signed autographs, and received free drinks from the bartender and phone numbers from girls. At the end of the night, I just said goodbye and walked away. There was no reveal moment for this undercover performance.

That fateful night gave birth to Improv Everywhere, which I started as a website the next morning at my temp job. Rather than waiting around for a "big break," I decided I would create my own opportunities. Who needs a stage? New York City itself is the best stage in the world. Six months later I was directing a Christmas play some college friends had put together in a rehearsal space in Lower Manhattan. I heard a massive roar from the streets, six floors below. We rushed to the window to discover hundreds of Santas marching up Broadway. This was my first exposure to Cacophony. It was awesome.

I remember Googling around that night trying to figure out what we had seen. I stumbled onto the Brooklyn Cacophony website and found out that I "may already be a member." Unfortunately the site at that time wasn't well-updated, and it appeared that the group wasn't active. Still, I was inspired to learn that there were others who had been doing similar things to me for years. On

the recommendation of public radio host Jesse Thorn, I bought a copy of Re/Search #11 Pranks and devoured every word. It was fascinating to learn the rich history of countercultural pranks.

Improv Everywhere has grown quite a bit since 2001. We now regularly stage stunts with participant counts in the thousands. I think part of that growth is attributed to the era we live in. I got started right around the same time that digital photography, miniDV cameras, and Final Cut Pro made documentation easy and affordable. A few years later YouTube arrived and changed my life. Suddenly the weird projects I was doing with my friends had a potential audience of millions.

Social media has also changed the game. Five or six years ago I was the unique guy who could get hundreds of people to do his ridiculous idea. Now, anyone with a good idea can use social media to recruit her army. Invite your friends and have them invite theirs and suddenly you have a crowd. I remember a few years back an exchange student arrived at NYU from London without a single friend in the city. He started a Facebook event saying he was going to bring the popular "Silent Disco" meme he had participated in back in the UK to NYC. A few weeks later he had a thousand people dancing silently to music in their headphones in Union Square. If a 19-year-old kid from out-of-town can do it, so can you.

We live in an age where you do not need anyone else's permission to express yourself. No one needs to greenlight your idea. Create exactly what you want to make and put it online to be shared with the masses for free. If it's good, it will rise to the top. Stop waiting for an invitation to create. You don't need a book deal to write. You don't need to sell a screenplay to make a movie. You don't need a prank show on MTV to cause chaos. Equipment is cheap (you probably have an HD camera in your phone!) Distribution is free. And it's never been easier to connect with like-minded co-conspirators.

Go get to work.





## A 12-step Program for Aspiring Cacophonists

Stuart Mangrum

“Yesterday’s weirdness is tomorrow’s reason why.” —Hunter S. Thompson, *The Curse of Lono*

So you’ve read this far and you think you may already be a member, but you’re sad. And why are you sad? Because the Cacophony Society is a thing of the past and you don’t have a time machine. But don’t be deterred by the so-called laws of physics, friend. Living the Cacophonous lifestyle may yet be within your grasp. Like a scraggly but determined tomcat, Cacophony has successfully transmitted its strange DNA into an extended family of seedy offspring. And when it comes right down to it, all it takes to squirt out a new six-fingered love-kitten is two weirdos and a plan. If you believe that one of those weirdos might be you, read on. Rather than ruminate on past glories or pontificate on What it All Meant, this writer has chosen instead to offer you a twelve-point action plan for creating your own Cacophonous community.

### Make the city your playground

If you live in a city, there’s no reason to ever be bored. And don’t whine about your empty pockets – there are a million things you can do on the cheap or on the free. Stop looking at the urban landscape as a series of commute routes and practical destinations (work, eat, sleep) and open your eyes to the nooks and crannies and forgotten byways that are every Cacophonist’s birthright. A great way to start is to organize a game: a treasure hunt, capture-the-flag, or a covert ops/hunter-killer plot of your own design. Urban games were always a staple of S.F. Cacophony, and the possibilities are even vaster now that nearly everyone carries a phone with GPS and a camera. For inspiration, do a search on *Can You See Me Now*, *PacManhattan*, and the *Elsewhere Philatelic Society*. Geocaching is another tech-enabled gaming approach with obvious cacophonous applications. And if you’re in San Fran at Tet time, you can always test your wits against the venerable *Chinese New Year Treasure Hunt*, and rub shoulders with old-time Cacophonists and Suicide Clubbers along the way. For the more adventurous, any number of abandoned buildings,

subterranean passageways, and urban wastelands are waiting to be explored. For ideas and inspiration, check out [darkpassage.com](http://darkpassage.com) and [urbanexplorers.net](http://urbanexplorers.net).

### Take a Zone Trip

We live in a big, weird world, and you should take every opportunity to get out there and explore it. The minimum requirements for a zone trip are you, one or more fellow travelers, and a mysterious destination. Festivals are always a good rallying point, but the focus of your trip could be literally anything and anywhere that strikes your fancy. The *Atlas Obscura* ([atlasobscura.com](http://atlasobscura.com)) is a great resource for finding unusual places. But wherever you go, keep in mind that Cacophonous travel is more than just picking a destination. Consider the process of getting there and getting back, don’t make it too easy, and stay open to weird interruptions and surprises along the way. Look for The Line, and don’t hesitate to cross it when you see it. Flawless trips make shitty stories. And in the words of veteran zone-tripper Dr. Burke, “planning is overrated.”

### Cultivate odd friends

This may be the single most important step you can take on your path to cosmic Cacophonocity. On your own, you’re just a lone nut. But when you join forces with other lone nuts you become a society of nuts, and there’s nothing you can’t achieve. Look deep into your DNA and you will find the genes of a pack hunter, not all that different from the helixes that link a troop of bonobos or a pod of orcas. This is the lesson that customarily gets taught in high school through football, basketball, and all those other team blood-sports you probably hated. But keep in mind that Cacophony is the exact opposite of high school: here we all want to sit at the weirdo table with the freaks and geeks, and nobody wants to sit with the popular kids. Popular is boring. Let the conformist drones sit at their own boring table and eat their boring, lookalike lunches. Get out of your home room, activate your pack-hunter genes and seek out the others who dare

to be strange, the ones who are not like you, and possibly like no one else in the world. Get to know them. Befriend them. Exchange dangerous ideas. If you’re really lucky, you may even get to mate with one and raise weird children.

### Cacophonize your closet

No self-respecting Cacophonist would be caught dead wearing this year’s must-have styles. Instead, we are far more likely to be spotted combing the thrifts, bidding at costume auctions, or rocking a sewing machine. In general, ours is not a materialistic culture, but this is the exception that proves the rule: we covet costumery and value vintage. The well-accoutered Cacophonist has at least one swanky formal outfit and a selection of costumes that might include any or all of the following: a Santa suit, a clown suit, Western wear, a pirate outfit, and any number of Mad-Maximum Burner outfits. A sensible business suit is always a useful disguise, as are wigs, fake beards, trucker hats, fezes, and obsolete military uniforms. “I could never wear that in public” is the opposite of Cacophonist thinking.

### Make something

If you’ve read this far, you may have already concluded that Cacophony is, to some extent, a rejection of consumer culture. If this is so, it’s less for political than for practical reasons, since Cacophonists have historically tended to be underemployed and underpaid. Moreover, consumer culture is the epitome of conformist behavior, which the good Cacophonist instinctively abhors. Maybe that’s why the alumni roster is so full of artists, writers, builders, designers, inventors, entrepreneurs, and mad scientists. Whether by predisposition or by evolution, creative pursuits seem to be a natural consequence of the six-fingered path. If you want to meet fellow travelers, go to a Maker Faire ([makerfaire.com](http://makerfaire.com)). Better yet, drive there in your art car ([artcars.com](http://artcars.com)). Or your steam-powered house ([neverwashaul.com](http://neverwashaul.com)). Or ride over on your tall bike ([cyclecide.com](http://cyclecide.com)).

### Burn something

While it’s hard to deny that Burning Man and Cacophony went through a messy divorce in 1996, accounts of either party having “ruined” or “destroyed” the other are ridiculous. Granted, today’s Burning Man is nowhere near as subversive or dangerous as it used to be, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t go. In fact, if you’ve never been, and you fancy yourself a freak, you really owe it to yourself to go at least once. Don’t listen to the jaded; if you look under the hood of the Burning Man machine you will find that it still runs on Cacophony fuel. Radical inclusion, self-expression, no sponsors, no vendors, and all the other 10 Commandments for Burners are pure *Rough Draft*, even if some of the rougher edges have been

sanded off for your safety. You don’t even have to lay down the big money and trek out to Nevada – there are regional spin-off events all around the world, some of them arguably truer to the original intent than the sprawling dustopolis of Black Rock City. Better still, start your own cult. Never forget that the whole thing started with two roommates, a pile of scrap lumber, and a match.

### Read more, watch less

It’s no accident that so many Cacophony events have been based on literary themes, or that so many alumni have killed their TVs. Books are rife with arcane and dangerous ideas that percolate through your brain, color your dreams, and realign your thinking in ways that TV and the Internet cannot. They stimulate, rather than repress, the life of the mind – especially when you discuss them with your oddball friends. The Proust and Bukowski events described in these pages have inspired many subsequent reading groups, such as the Belligerati (“The cricket bat of literary discourse”) and its successor the Obliterati (“A drinking club with a reading problem”), which have been holding monthly meetings in various Bay Area dive bars for nearly a decade. Forget about all the usual book-club claptrap, and throw away those stupid “suggested discussion questions.” All you need to get started is two people who like to read and a place to talk. Then, whenever you see someone reading something interesting, or whenever a stranger comments on the book you’re toting, jump them into your little gang and make them a member. Before you know it you’ll be a Society.

### Become a niche expert

One of the hallmarks of cacophonous eccentricity is pursuing some arcane field of scholarship. It usually starts as a strange hobby (fire breathing, burlesque dancing, Bulgarian folk music) and just keeps growing. Maybe you learn so much about local history in your subterranean travels that you start hosting offbeat walking tours, like Herron (Dashiell Hammett walks) or Haller (Tenderloin history tours). Or maybe you become such a bridge geek that you get hired as a drawbridge operator (Law). Or your obsession with building killer robots leads you to produce the international ComBots competition (Calkins and Davalos). Or maybe your love for accordions – playing them, listening to them, taking them apart – leaves you holding the keys to your own accordion shop (Smythe). Other ex-Cacophonists have distinguished themselves by writing about fringe culture, opening specialty stores, or turning their homes into museums of kitsch. What they all have in common is a passion for tunneling deep into a narrow subject area, carving out an area of expertise, and making it their own.

### Make a spectacle of yourself

Every good Cacophonist loves a parade, and will tell you that the best vantage point is always from the inside looking out, not from the sidewalk looking in. In San Francisco, Bishop Joey hosts the Saint Stupid's Day Parade every year on April 1st, and other cities have equally ridiculous events like the Doo-Dah Parade. The Cacophony Santa runs of old have morphed into a worldwide phenomenon with hundreds of local chapters as far flung as Antarctica, making it ridiculously easy to get your Santa on (santarchy.com). Cacophonous thinking is clearly evident in performance groups like the Extra Action Marching Band (extra-action.com), Reverend Al's Art of Bleeding (artofbleeding.com), and the Improv Everywhere flashmob cabal (improveverywhere.com). Study these phenomena and cook up your own spectacular spectacle.

**Pull an epic prank**

Another offspring of the Suicide Club and a sibling of the Cacophony Society, The Billboard Liberation Front has been creatively modifying outdoor advertising since 1977. Some of its more spectacular improvement actions have involved massive freeway billboards, custom neon, and high-steel rigging, but the group also conducts small-scale neighborhood improvements. If you want to start your own splinter cell, you can download the free pamphlet, "The Art and Science of Billboard Improvement," at billboardliberation.com. More ambitious pranksters should study the work of the Yes Men (theyesmen.org). And no Cacophonist's bookshelf

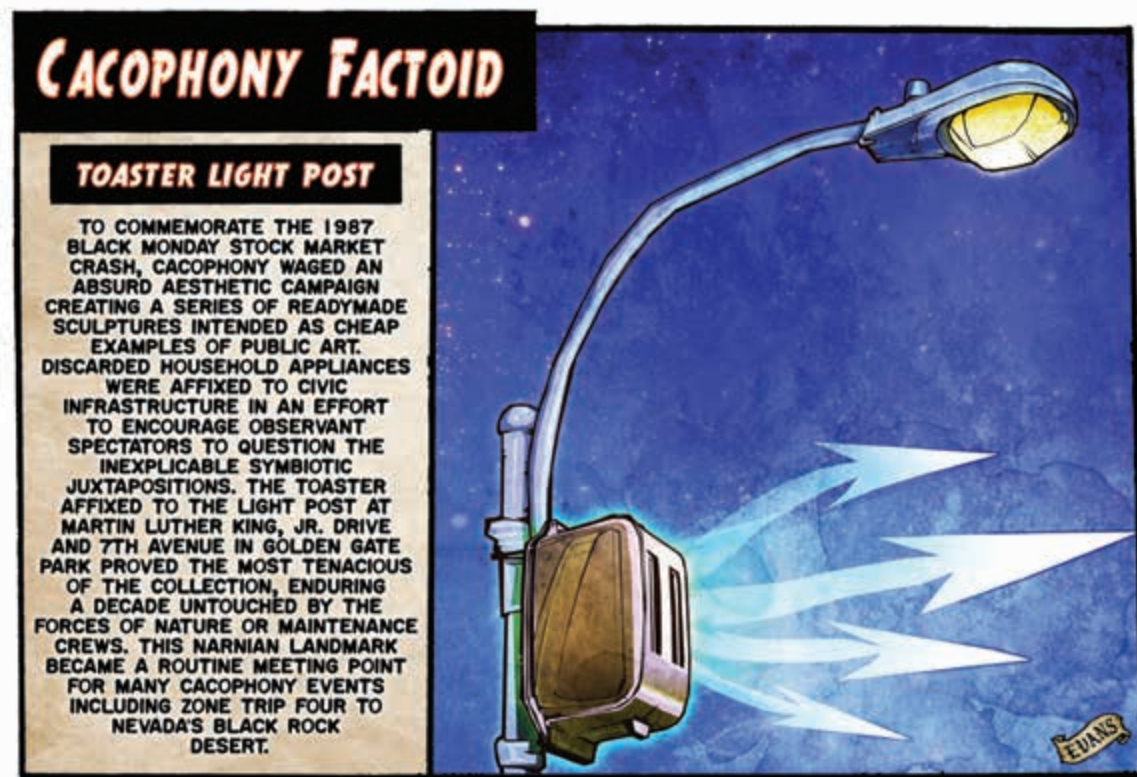
is complete without a copy of Vale's classic *Re/Search Pranks!* (researchpubs.org)

**Expand your comfort zone**

Like all good Bad Ideas, Cacophony begins in the mind. The more you can do to beat down conformist reflexes and embrace your inner weirdo, the closer you will be to Cacophonous self-actualization. Strive to cultivate an attitude that is curious and open-minded. Resist jaded hipster thinking and encourage childish behavior. Try to do at least one thing every day that feels strange, wrong, or frightening. Listen to music that you think you hate. Watch obscure films in foreign languages. Go to a gay bar (if you're straight) or a straight bar (if you're gay). Embrace the exceptional, spurn the bandwagon, and color outside the lines. Be the nail that sticks up, and fear not the hammer.

**Leave the world a weirder place**

The twelfth step will have to remain a mystery for now, because you're going to have to come up with it on your own. And that's the true magic of Cacophony: the endless well of invention that we drill into the shared hallucination called reality. Once you've successfully self-mutated, your Cacophony DNA will give you a unique ability to surprise everyone, including yourself. So go ahead and get going, friend. We'll all be watching, and we may even already be members.



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|  |  |
|--|--|
| Abruzzo, Rick.....142  | Gould, Jack .....103                           |
| Beale, Scott.....154, 155  | Greenky, Allen .....186                        |
| Berman, Dave .....101  | Hicks, Mick.....8                              |
| Binzen, William.....76, 78   | Hubbard, Robert.....224                        |
| Blank, Harrod.....90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 128, 129   | Hunstra, Victor.....113                        |
| Blazenhoff, Rusty.....38, 134, 139, 162, 171, 178, 192   | Hyde, Sebastian .....96                        |
| Bohn, Jessica.....164  | Law, John .....42, 43, 45, 77, 89, 133         |
| Broemmel, Jason.....184, 186   | Lewis, Wild Don.....24                         |
| Campbell, Bob .....12, 13, 14  | Mancuso, Gregory .....11                       |
| Congio, Sam.....160, 161   | Mobia, Steve.....2                             |
| Cyber Sam.....144, 163   | Northrup, Jillian.....160, 161                 |
| Engdahl, Jason.....146, 148  | Pauline, Mark.....154, 155                     |
| Field, Peter .....xii, 5, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 137, 139, 140, 158, 167, 168, 171, 180, 182, 183, 196, 206, 214, 217, 235, 246, 248, 250, 251, 263 | Perry, Vivian.....81, 82, 83, 84, 85           |
| Fortune, Quackser.....149  | Rosenthal, Nicole .....150, 180, 181, 182, 183 |
| Galbraith, Carrie.....17, 86, 199, 211, 252, 258   | Spellitech, Kal .....166                       |
| Glau, Phillip.....109  | Warren, David.....xiv, 2                       |
| Goggin, Brian.....137, 176   | White, Steve .....15                           |



R.I.P.  
Paul Addis  
Paul was Cacophony.  
He lived each day as though it were his last.  
One day was.

